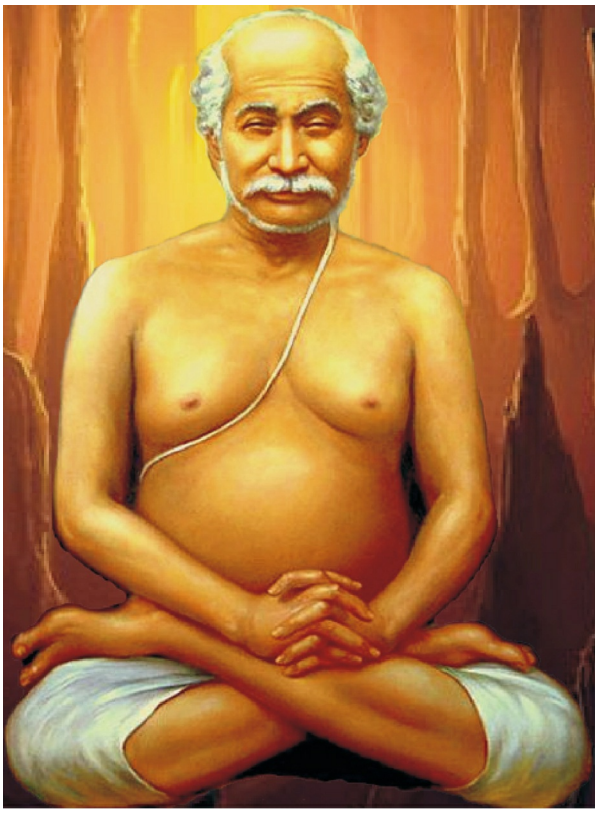
Kaviyogi Vedham

Autobiography of kaviyogi vedham

My Spiritual Journey From a Tiny village to Himalayan Lahari babaji Cave



My Spiritual Journey from a Tiny village to Himalayan Lahari Babaji -Cave

DEDICATION

At the outset, I dedicate this work to my mother Smt..Sornammal – who raised me – born with a weak physique, to be a strong person. She always stood behind me as a symbol of strength and support. .

Next, I dedicate this work to my Paternal Grandfather Shree K V S Gargar, who breathed into me the quest for the spiritual path. As a child, he taught me to chant various Divine slokas and mantras. He inspired in me the divine poetic compositions and metaphors of the Great Poet Shri Subramanya Bharati. My Grandfather, a pillar of strength was ever by my side throughout my Growing years.

Finally, my humble dedication of this work to My Master, a saint, and Guru Sree Lahiri Mahashay Babaji, I am so blessed to be chosen as his disciple by His Grace when he appeared in my dream. I was then only 12 years of age. He has guided and stayed with me in the tough and strenuous path of –"Yoga and Enlightenment".

My Autobiography " My spiritual journey from a tiny village to The Himalayan Babaji's cave" is humbly dedicated to these pillars of my life. .I profusely thank my daughter RajiBala,,who has put her wholehearted support and great efforts in translating my Tamil book in English..

(KAVIYOGI VEDHAM)- Dated24-04-2019

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(Raji Bala-The TRANSLATOR"S NOTE!)-

Shree Kaviyogi Vedham, affectionately known to all his friends, fellow poets and disciples as "Yogiyar", is my father.. With my elder sister and younger brother also ,from our tender age, we were groomed in spiritual and poetic lore. Our childhood days were ever surrounded by literary works in the Tamil language. Powerful poetry of Great Poet Bharathiyar occupied every crevice of our childhood. Yogic asanas and postures took natural habitat in daily living. Ever

surrounded by great books on the spirit and saints, reading on the spiritual and books other than the material world/things, became our natural companions. I distinctly remember when, I was in fifteenth year, that I stumbled upon the great book – "An Autobiography of a Yogi" authored by Swami ParamahamsaYogananda. There were also many other saintly books of which noteworthy of mention would be the works of Swami Rama and Sri M and several others..

Some evenings,. our father would be in a mood to share with us some of his inner spiritual experiences. The stories and anecdotes would mystify us so much that today, in my 46th year, it makes me wonder that perhaps, all those lofty experiences narrated in the books – Autobiography of a Yogi and others were actually the spititual outcome of our father through his yogic practices. I can state with some conviction that Shri Kaviyogiyar was not only our biological father, but also our Spiritual Master. I can never cease to thank our good fortune.

During our childhood days, many times we would accompany our father to his meetings. These meetings were gatherings- both poetic and spiritual in content. We saw and met there many poets, advanced spiritual seekers – many of whom were firmly devoted to our father. In hindsight, I am convinced that my father had planted that seed in me which is today, a growing spiritual banyan tree within me.

My father's life long spiritual quest ie. I mean this divine book, was released in Tamil in 2017. The cover page portraying the picture of his Master Sri Lahiri Mahasaya Babaji was absolutely fascinating. I feasted in the every written word between both the covers and I was so enthralled. My fascination was boundless and any amount of reading could not quench my spiritual eagerness. Then this thought struck me that .. "Alas! the Non Tamil populace should also benefit from this great spiritual journey." .

The desire to complete a word to word translation of this book was kindled in me although I did not express my intention to my father. Just around that time, a couple who followed the teachings of Shri Lahiri Mahashay Baba in North, visited our Bangalore home. In the course of the conversation, they were presented with a copy of my father's autobiography. Seeing the cover page adorning the image of Lahari Babaji they were in tears. In great excitement they opened the book eager to partake the words within but were crestfallen as they- being North Indians, Tamil was a foreign tongue to them. They immediately expressed concern to me,– "Madam! If this book is translated in English, people like us will be really happy to read in full and experience the bliss which your father had enjoyed, as we were under the impression that Shri Lahiri Babaji was known only in the northern parts of India."

They added,." Dear Raji Madam! it is indeed astonishing as to how your father had chosen Shri Lahiri Mahasaya Babaji as his spiritual beacon… We would simply love to read his own experiences with this wonderful saint".

I was thrilled to note this and it was as if my venture to translate the work in English has been directly blessed to proceed. My father and mother were at that time, spending time abroad in Canada with my younger brother Swaminathan and his family. I presented this idea to my father and he abruptly confirmed that that was what was precisely running in his mind. This was a total surprise. I felt as if Shri Lahiri MahashayBabaji – who was affectionately known to us as " Great Grandpa" right from childhood had chosen me to take up this monumental work.

RAJI BALA,

Bengaluru

Dated-20-04-2019

BOOK REVIEW

By- ’Kavivezham’ Sri. Ilandhai S. Ramaswamy , Chicago,U.S.A

Yes, Friends! This appealing Autobiography has been written by my close friend and the best poet Vedham. The book ties you from the beginning to the end with lots of surprising events. If we analyze it deeply, each person is a yogi by himself. God prepares us for this realization and descends us into this earth. A baby folds its hands and legs inside the womb of a mother and grows in a yogic posture. Once we are out into this world, we tend to forget this. But, some people develop themselves further to become Yogis.

Neither did I have clarity about my past life nor Karma theory before. Though I did not study Tamil grammar and poetry deeply , when someone posed questions about it, I was able to answer them correctly. How was that possible? I used to think whether the knowledge is transferable from previous births? After reading this book, I came to understand the Author's yogic connections in his past life. Although a person has his Guru's Blessings, one cannot escape the clutches of one's karma. At the right time, the Guru's Blessings will save one from getting destroyed totally from the negative karmic effects.

In this book, the first chapter starts with the birth of the Author. He has described that particular Wednesday in such a manner that it sticks to our hearts. It looks as if he has seen his own birth personally in a village house. The nature of writing portrays a picture of how a village household looks like early in the morning; that too one which expects a new-born soon, buzzing with lots of activity.

The initial lines of the story start with a description of the nature which is a beautiful one. Then, the story moves to the house where the situation is controlled and taken hold of by the Cook named Gandhimathi Ammal. The orders given out by her to manage the situation is described in the best possible manner. The way he has depicted the character of Gargar picturizes him as a soft-hearted person. Though he is my most favourite character, his peculiar name intrigues me! How did he get this name? Kaviyogi vedham describes this aspect in later chapters.

Mr.Gargar, author's grandpa left his home at a very young age but elevated himself to a higher position by hard work, courage and with his beautiful skill in English language. He plays a major role in the story. He simply captures the attention of the readers by the way of his deliverance. His open hearted nature of praising others and seeing the goodness in everyone is seen in our Vedham too.

Though the book is about the biography of the writer, the novel goes like that of a suspense one. The ending paragraph in certain chapters pushes us to jump to the next one. The whole narration moves forward with intricate weaving of unexpected twists, the technique which the author has employed throughout.

Since the writer happens to be a Poet, the description at some places goes with beautiful anecdotes, comparisons and Poems. Many of the dialogues and words used in the novel are actually used by the common folk in the Tirunelveli District of southern Tamilnadu.

The description of his Guru by the writer at his young age in a dream is very vivid. The period when the writer faced problems in his life and the remedies which his Guru suggested seem unfathomable but every single experience of his is nothing but the truth.

The writer's father can be compared to a Jack-fruit. The situations where the writer and his brothers suffer under the strict military authority makes us feel bad and at the same time pushes our eagerness to know what will happen further. But, like the hidden sweetness inside a leathery, rough skinned Jack-fruit, the affection of a normal father unfurls towards his son at certain instances.

Guru Mahan Lahari Mahasaya's blessings are ineffable! Vedham has given solace and solutions for many problems, not only to his family circle, but also to his friends through his Guru's guidance. I know this personally as his very close friend..

The characters like Sampoornam, Rakhisamuthu Thevar and many more have been portrayed beautifully. The whole story has been penned down with strong dialogues splattered throughout. The book once picked up is difficult to keep back unless it is finished in one stretch. Such is the power of this book.

This book is suitable for all age-groups; particularly for those who need faith to raise themselves higher in the Spiritual path. I express my sincere wishes to my dear friend Vedham to shine more in the spiritual path and to help people master the Art of Yoga and Meditation to enrich their lives. I sincerely request him to keep writing more such experiences of his and bring out a Sequel to this book soon.

Kavimamani, 'Kavivezham' Ilandhai S.Ramaswamy

Chicago, U.S.A

23/03/2019.

CHAPTER 1

A BABY YOGI BORN IN MAY(--A hot season!)-

It was a Wednesday. The sunshine of the spring was bathing the porticos of all the houses in Athazhanallur village of Tirunelveli District. Particularly the house which was beautifully constructed with iron railings, looking like the final piece of sugarcane among the row of houses, was specially bathed with extra amount of sunshine. That is because there were no houses in front of it. There was a piece of land in front, adorned with green grass here and there. There were two huge stones for the people to sit there and a small dilapidated compound wall. All these were reflecting the heat of the sun on the house. There were a few cows grazing without any world worries.

The beautiful magnificent temple in that small Athazhanallur village(called by some naughty people as Kukkiramam!) was dedicated to Lord Perumal (Mahavishnu]. The deity was offered tamarind rice and curd rice as prasadham. The offering was over and the final Aarthi was performed. As if to say that all these were happening inside the temple promptly, the temple bell was ringing with a rhythmic tone.

But something was going on in that said beautiful house. What was that? There was a sound of unbearable pain and crying of a lady inside. It was very disturbing for the residents of the house .The old man and his wife,(who was blind,)- were very much worried.

Gandhimathi, the cook of the house, who was also taking care of the old woman, was the one who was bravely handling the situation. She was commanding the old man and his second son Lakshmanan.

"What is this? Why are you both standing like statues? Can you not see how Sornam is shouting and writhing in pain?

Lakshman!- Go fast and call that midwife Paaru. Tell her the situation and bring her with you. If she is not in her house, then she will be in the petty shop at Kottai Street. Tell her that it is urgent. Uncle, please give him five rupees. Only then she will oblige. Greedy though, she is a good midwife ".

Having heard this, the old man or senior man of that home gave money to his son and asked him to be careful about it. " my boy!Don't wander around here and there. Run fast and bring that lady Paru..".

After his son left, he turned towards his wife and spoke with a heavy heart. "See, Lakshmi! Is this the time for your son Ramji to go to the fields? Why didn't you ask him to stay home explaining the situation that the baby may be born anytime this week? I have never seen him care for his pregnant wife. His mind is always fixed on the work outside. The only thing which gives him happiness is to push and taunt people to work. Never once has he shown kindness to the labourers. I see him as Sage Durvaasar, always holding anger at the tip of his nose".

As soon as he uttered this, his wife Lakshmi got upset. "Now, what has happened so bad that you are blaming my elder son? If not for him, the farm labourers will never do their work properly. Each month, we are getting fresh farm vegetables, coconuts and fruits. They also keep visiting us as you are unable now a days to go there personally. If you do so, you come back with giddiness because of diabetes. " She kept on retaliating back with anger.

"Ok! Ok! Can you both stop fighting for a while and take care of Sornam? There is a lot of work waiting to be done for me in the kitchen." Gandhimathi said with an air of superiority.

In spite of her physical condition, the old woman Lakshmi caressed her daughter-in-law affectionately. She placed Sornam's head softly on her lap and uttered. "Sornam, this is your first delivery. So, there will be some slight pain. Please bear it. We are all with you. Paaru will arrive at any moment from now. After that, all your pain will dissolve like the drops of dews in the sun".

Looking at his mother's kind behaviour with her daughter-in-law, her son Ramji teased her one day. " Amma ! You don't know how to behave like a mother-in-law. Since Sornam is obedient, you treat her like a princess. I don't understand why she is so special for you!..Although I cleared my senior Cambridge degree in Burma, you forced me into marrying her just because she is related to us ". Ramji could not bear the reason that his wife had passed merely fifth class in school..

Lakshmi burst out with anger, unable to hear the angry words of her son. "You fool, I lost my eye sight ten years ago only because of you. I thought you will change your attitude after marriage but you are still the same like Durvasar. "

Lakshmi Ammal chided herself now for rethinking the not so good memories at such a crucial time. Automatically , she raised her folded hands towards the beautiful wall painting of Lord MahaVishnu painted by Raja Ravi Verma . "Oh God! The Saviour ! I don't have anyone who can help me right now. Please save my daughter-in-law. " Immediately, she felt the presence of God in the form of light telling her not to worry and the child will be delivered normally in a few minutes.

By the time the midwife arrived, it was eleven AM. Lakshmanan was playful as always he was and couldn't locate Paaru at her home or inside the petty shop. He had to enquire at several places to find her ultimately at a field which belonged to Muniyan . Paaru had given a loan to him and had gone there to retrieve it.

Meanwhile, the scene at home was not good. They were all angry at Lakshmanan for bringing her very late. Surely, it was not a time of cell phones like the present. Isn't it?

Finally, Paaru came. She made Sornam, who was crying in pain, to sit properly and applied some castor oil on her abdomen. "Sornam dear child , your pain is only temporary and will vanish once the baby comes out. You will laugh heartily looking at the baby. Mark my words."

Paaru said softly, massaging Sornam's abdomen gently. Soon, Sornam started to shout in pain. The midwife Paaru turned towards Lakshmi Ammal . " See Amma, the baby will be delivered normally within an hour. The baby appears to be small". Then she commanded the lady cook Gandhimathi to prepare some hot water and bring the specially made herbal oil that she had prepared and given to her earlier.

By the time Paaru was giving these instructions, the time was more than twelve and the heat of the sun was rising every single minute. The front porch and the stairs of the houses were burning with heat. Particularly, around this house,

it seemed that the light of the sun was growing high minute by minute and trying to enter the inside portion of house.

Mahadeva Sastrigal was the village astrologer. He felt that the brightness of the sun that day was hinting at something special and strange to him.. "Hmm!the birth of a divine child, maybe". He surmised as he took his astrologic board and charts and started calculating the time. He noted what he found out in his note book.

Well! As per the astrologer's prediction, at an auspicious time in the afternoon, a beautiful male child was born in the house with the tremendous efforts of Paaru. The cry of the baby resembled a little shriek of cuckoo. It sounded as if it was already regretting to be born in this world rather than enjoying the fruits of the heavenly abode. The crying of the child did not stop for fifteen minutes. Seeing this, Paaru gave some sugar water mixed with a few drops of milk to the mouth of that small baby. The baby eventually calmed down and its eyes twinkled when it faced its mother. Slowly he fell into a deep sleep. Meanwhile, the midwife did all the required formalities to be done after a child birth. After a while, she cleaned the baby and gave a hot water massage to Sornam.

Though Sornam felt very weak, with great difficulty she sipped the warm herbal concoction which Paaru gave. She felt happy looking at her son but seeing him as a puny child, she also felt like crying.

Looking at Sornam, Paaru could guess what was going on in her mind. She caressed her gently and assured her that the child will put on weight in no time. She also assured that she will come every day to bathe the child and give jaggery water and milk. Furthermore, she said that with mother's milk, the child's health will get soon better. With this she asked Sornam to take rest peacefully and her child will be taken care of.

After all these, Paaru gave the child to the eagerly waiting old couple addressing him as their beautiful prince. She asked Gargar to make note of the exact time of the birth of the child for writing the horoscope. Paaru was an expert in this. She was known for pulling a big scene if a proper clock was not given during the time of delivery. She would personally ensure that the clock showed the correct time.

Holding the tiny baby, Gargar smiled and asked Paaru. "Paaru, I am very much worried about this child. Look! how thin and fragile he is." But the midwife was unperturbed. "Sir, you are a highly educated man. Do you know how many deliveries I have come across so far? Why do you worry so much? Sornam is very thin. So her baby is also lean. I will visit them every day and take care of them. Now Amma, please give my payment. After a long time, a prince is born in your house. Be generous in giving." Paaru said, looking at Gandhimathi. The old man went inside to take the money.

At the same time, the baby's father Ramji rushed inside. With curiosity, he asked, " Amma! Where is my child? Please show it to me ".

" Ayya! See your little prince!" Paaru said, holding the baby and carefully placing him in Ramji's hands.

"Oh! What is this? He looks like a white crow. He looks so thin. Will he survive?" These were the first words which slipped out of his mouth. Ramji asked Paaru with a hint of doubt in his voice. Hearing this Lakshmi ammal became terribly angry. "Ramji! Do you even realize what you are speaking? You are the proud father now of this child and don't you know that you are not supposed to talk like this? Can you not utter good positive words even once? If Sornam hears all these, how sad she will become!" She was sure to hit him had Ramji been standing near her.

"Sir, See how fair the baby looks! Why do you speak like this? " . Paaru said with a bit of hatred in her voice.

"Yes! Yes! It is true. A crow king is born as a child for me." Ramji laughed loudly. But inside his heart, a faint sorrowful thought ran like a thread. Thoughts of the previous day flashed in his mind. "Why! Yesterday, Mahadeva Sastrigal spoke with confidence that I will be blessed with a lucky child. But now I am not even sure whether he will survive for long! ".

Meanwhile, Gargar, father of Ramji came there with a pl
gifts and money to be given to Paru., the midwife.

(Lord Vinayaka image worshipped by Gargar, grandpa of B

CHAPTER -2

PRAYERS ONLY SAVED THE CHILD

Paaru, the midwife smiled heartily showing all her teeth. Why not? The money, Betel leaves with nuts and turmeric along with a twinkling beautiful saree in the plate was the reason for her happiness. The amount was nothing less than fifty rupees. There were extra coins too. The value of fifty rupees was much more during the period of 1942. She took the plate happily with tears rolling down her cheeks. Wiping the tears , Paaru spoke .

" You should all have a happy blessed life, Saami ! This is a very lucky child. Take good care of him. Mark my words. He will grow like a king." Uttering this, Paaru waved her hands in such a manner to ward off evil eyes from that crow prince. With this, she touched Ammalu's fingers gently bading her good bye.

" Yes, Paaru! Please do visit frequently to have a look and take care of the child. Okay?" uttered Lakshmi Ammal. Gargar also happily asked her to come back again. The fact that a baby boy had been born in the household made his eyes watery..

With a hint of pride in his voice, he touched his disabled wife and spoke. "Ammalu! Can you see the power of Shalagrama Vishnu whom I pray daily? How smart Paaru is ! How well she has blessed the child with love and a contented heart! Did you hear? I will surely raise this child like a king. At the right age, I will teach him the slokas, mantras and japam".

Having heard the news of the birth of a child in Gargar's household, villagers, relatives, Sornam's father Venkatachalam Iyer, her sister Sampoornam ,who was living in one of the houses in the same row in the village, and all other neighbours came to have a look of the newborn who was put behind a makeshift curtain in the hall. They all caressed and blessed the baby. They brought some diamond shaped sugar cubes and table sugar as per the custom and placed them before the grandmother

of the child.

“ Hmm! Ammalu Mami! Now you have got a grandson to keep company. You will have a jolly good time”, said the young woman Sampoornam with naughtiness and happiness in her voice. She felt that her sister was lucky to be the daughter-in-law of a rich famous household and had proved her motherhood by giving birth to a male child.

“ Ok! Ok! You naughty girl. Come here!” Saying so ,Lakshmi Ammal pulled Sampoornam’s hand. “ Now sing that Bhairavi ragam song ‘ Sakala sowbhagyam tharum amba ‘. Whenever you visit our house, you sing with your sweet cuckoo like voice which lessens my worries. Let Uncle also listen. Hmmm ... Sing now. ” As soon as Lakshmi Ammal uttered these words, Sampoornam started singing without any hesitation , sitting in Padmasan.. . Her eyes always showed a meditative spirit while singing in an upright posture. It was her Guru’s blessings. The whole village used to attribute her extensive memory power to Goddess Saraswathi’s blessings. Indeed her power in rendering the songs and ragas as taught by her Guru was no a small feat. If not for her family, she would have become a great musician. What could be done? The family ,including her mother , abided by the strict rules against women folk coming out to perform on stage in those days. They believed that the entire village reputation would get tarnished by this act.

Now the entire household was immersed in her rendition. The people who had come there to see the child forgot their gossips and small talks and were engrossed in her melodious voice. Sampoornam opened her eyes only after the completion of the song. Everyone clapped and praised her. She was sitting a bit away from the newborn and the mother. But, the commotion created did not affect them as they were sleeping soundly behind the temporary partition.

So , when requests arose for another song, Sampoornam elaborated on a kambodhi raga song. Everyone , including Ramji and Gargar enjoyed the performance. The cook, Gandhimathi came out of the kitchen making hand gestures of “Tala’ as she knew a little Carnatic music.

People started dispersing one by one after this. They mused that the birth of Sornam's child had given them a chance to experience the divine in the form of musical feast.

Lakshmi Ammal did not allow Sampoornam to leave immediately. " You have to enjoy a feast with payasam [a sweet porridge]. After the meals, I will give you betel leaves and nuts . You have turned this house into a divine place through your music. I am very proud of you my sweet girl!." She clutched her hands tightly.

The house should have remained like this with the divine music mellowing . But fate had other plans . The naming ceremony of the child was celebrated on the twelfth day of its birth. The child was named as Subramanian . Unfortunately , it also fell ill on the same day with severe cold and fever. The grand parents were very disturbed and started chanting Lord's names continuously. Gargar sent a word to Mahadeva Sastrigal to perform Shalagrama puja in the house as he was not supposed to do it by himself .

Chapter-3

PREDICTION AND MEDICATION

Mahadeva Sastrigal had a soft voice but had a glowing face. His physique also will make everybody to bow down to him showing respect, for,… he was always doing some penance chanting all Sakthi manthras.On seeing his arrival, Gargar came out with anxiety to greet him. Immediately after seeing him, he said with tears. " Sastriji! When my grand child was born, you came here and said that he will grow up as a very knowledgeable person with a long life and a kind attitude

towards all humanity. You also said that he has a strong influence of 'Guru star position' in his horoscope. But you see him now! How he is suffering! Some breathing difficulty is there! Do you have any remedy for this?" Gargar's voice was choking with emotion and tears rolled down from his eyes.

" Please keep the horoscopical remedy aside Gargar!. Right now, what is the medication you have given to the child ? " asked Sastrigal… "Our nurse Paaru had put some paste of herbs on the forehead of the child." Gargar replied. Sastrigal summoned the child and put him on his lap. He deeply focused on the eyes of the child for a few seconds. His tongue started rolling with some powerful mantras on Lord Murugan and Katyayani Devi. Then he placed the index finger of his right hand over the body of the child, slowly starting from his forehead , chest, stomach and finally, the legs still chanting the mantras. Then he held the chin of the baby , recited the powerful 'Shanmuga Kavasam' and assured that the illness will leave the baby now . The child appeared to slowly smile now …deeply seeing the face of the chanting Achariyar. That's it! The baby now started breathing normally .

" Gargarji!...Everything will be alright from now on. There is nothing to fear. His immunity level had reduced a bit. That was the problem!. Now the time is twelve noon. Go to Ambasamudram tomorrow. My Uncle's son Vaidyanathan is a Child-doctor there. I will give a recommendation letter to him.. Take a cart and bring him with you. He will give respect to my words. In the past six years, he has travelled to Delhi and Calcutta , practised medicine and gained lot of experience. Now he is settled in his native place to be with his parents .He is an expert child specialist. If he comes here, he will give special medicines and good advice on the child growth and to develop immunity. Will you do what I say?"

"Certainly! I will never disobey you sastriji!. You are a treasure trove for this village. You have travelled a lot towards north and have met many saints taken their blessings and mantras too. To have you in our midst is our blessings. Is it not ? Swami! Please don't go anywhere without telling me." Gargar took hold of his hands in excitement.
"Ok ! Ok ! Please don't praise me so much. Everything is due to my

Guru's blessings and Lord Murugan's boon to me. Shall I start Chalagrama puja now ? Oh! You have kept everything ready for it. Good!Good !"

He sat in padmasana on the floor upon a pooja- mat, in front of the wooden plank where the Chalagrama idols(BALLS)were kept ready for the rituals and started chanting Vishnu Sahasranamam and began to offer flowers to the vigraha.(idol)- Gargar chanted along with him. . The divine vibrations started spreading , from the floor of Puja room, and then to next room making the child feel goosebumps.

Sornam exclaimed happily seeing the child . "See, Paaru, how my child is smiling after listening the chanting manthras!". She bathed her baby with her fond kisses.

Paaru agreed to what Sornam said. " Yes ,Amma! It's a divine baby. See how it responds to the chanting!" She lightly pinched his tender cheeks and kissed him.

Finally, the whole puja was over. The prasadham [offering] was distributed and a spoon-ful of tulsi water was dropped to the baby's mouth,.. Sacred vibhuthi(ashes) were smeared on his forehead. The child instantly giggled happily, making others smile too.

A bag of coconuts, fruits, a piece of dhothi, betel leaves and a good sum of money was given to the priest. Mahadeva Sastrigal gave a personally written recommendation letter to Gargar, to be taken along with him while visiting the Ambasamudhram doctor .

The next morning, a bullock cart was arranged with the help of Subbiah uncle who resided in the corner house . The bulls were truly exceptionally strong, and the cart was driven by RakhimuthuThevar.

He was an expert in controlling bulls. The destination(Ambasamudram)- was reached before ten in the morning. Gargar quickly entered the house and produced the letter to the doctor.

The doctor was very happy seeing Gargar. He offered his respects, packed his medical kit and hopped on to the cart telling Gargar that this was an opportunity to see everyone including the new born and also his Sastri uncle.. As soon as he reached home, the baby was thoroughly checked by him..

“ Gargar Uncle! Now the baby is looking fine. He is a bit underweight. I am prescribing a medicine called Adaxillin(liquid) which is a new arrival in the market. Give it three times a day after feeding milk. Five drops, each time, is enough. Just wait and see! He will look better with the required weight- gain. Also give him some diluted cow’s milk with little sugar in the afternoon. It will boost his immunity. Don’t stop Adaxillin without asking me. He may need it for atleast two years”. Telling this, the doctor took his fees from Gargar and returned to his native place after seeing also his Sastri uncle.

After this incident , the child now named as Babu alias Subramanian grew up well with all physical strength.. Everyone was ecstasic. The doctor also regularly visited the child to monitor his health and growth. People in the village praised the child specialist for his blessed hands and experience. Thereafter he became the village family doctor for all people there. Thus life was moving on happily for this family with the child getting a lot of attention from everyone.

Six months passed smoothly. One fine morning , Ramji was sitting with his father chanting Vishnu Sahasranamam during the regular puja in the household. A sudden ‘boomerang voice’ alerted everyone. Alarmed, everyone rushed to the prayer room .

“ Hi Gargar!...I have arrived here with anger since all of you have forgotten me… Are you not ashamed?”. It appeared to all as though a thunder has fallen on the floor and everybody shook with fear!.....

(Kalvai Sri.Sastha image)

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– 4

ARRIVAL OF THE FAMILY DEITY IN Puja room

Everyone rushed to the puja room exclaiming about what could have happened suddenly. It was Ramji, the child’s father dancing fervently with bulging eyes , announcing “ I am Kalvaai Sastha, your Family Deity. Don’t you remember that you prayed deeply for your daughter-in-law for her safe delivery of a child? It is you and your wife who deeply

prayed to offer Abhishegam and Sarkkarai Pongal (a sweet porridge) to me! Answer me Gargar! It has been more than six months and it seems you have forgotten your promise completely to visit my temple. You have to do so within twelve days. If not, I don'tknow what might befall you all" Ramji shouted like never before and fell down like a tree. His brother Laskshmanan saved Ramji from the fall by holding his head immediately.

Meanwhile, Gargar took a little water from the jug kept for puja and splashed it on Ramji's face. Ramji awoke with a blank look on his face. "What happened to me? Why are you all looking at me with worry?" Ramji questioned.

"Hey Ramji!" Gargar uttered, trying to pacify him with soothening words. "Our Family Deity Sri Sastha reminded us of our pending prayers through you. We had promised to visit the temple, offer sweet pongal and prayers, after the safe delivery of the child. We had also promised that we will offer Annadhanam for poor people. For the past six months, we have forgotten this due to the bad health of our child. It is our blessings and fortunate time that the Lord himself has come to us to remind us of our duties. This means that the Lord is watching us and being with us constantly". He continued to talk. "Ok! After finishing our puja rituals, we will decide on an auspicious day to go to Kaalvai. We have to consult Mahadeva Sastrigal . He can accompany us if he is willing to."

After the elaborate Vishnu puja, everyone partook the prasadham offered to Lord followed by a sumptuous Lunch. Sornam was listening to all these and was elated instantly. She held the baby and spoke to him. "My Child Babu! You are very lucky. Our family deity has facilitated your birth in this household and Himself ordered now to visit His shrine to give you special blessings. Truly, you are a divine child." She kissed the child affectionately on his forehead so many times,making him squirm in her hands..

Now, i will narrate the story in my (Babu's) first person style for avoiding any confusion.. Shall we now go for a mini tour of Athazhanallur village which was responsible for all these happenings? Let us have a glimpse on the ancestral history of my Grandpa Gargar..

During those times, the village was green and prosperous. There were twelve houses down the street where the Brahmin families used to live. The 'L' shaped Sannadhi street comprised of eight houses including two dilapidated ones. Towards the east,beyond two miles, there were three families who were weavers, four families who were farmers and two families who were doing carpentry for their living. Their houses were in the Ganapathi street which was also called Adaviyar theru. After crossing this, we will encounter fields filled with greenery and surplus water flowing from the river Tambrabharani. There were two huge partitions holding water for the field along with a pathway for the water to overflow. The Adaviyar street remained cool always and the plants were healthy, showing off their greenery. The children used to play Kho-kho, Marbles and other games inspite of the heat of the afternoon sun. The street remained noisy throughout the day.

Apart from this, half a mile towards south was a street named Kottai street.. People had to pass through this street to go to Viravanallur. The street had ten houses only belonging to the Devar community. They made their living by taking care of the bulls and cows, milking cattle and driving the carts owned by the landowners of the village.

When there was work in the fields, they would accompany the landowners posing as helpers. They were efficient in managing the workers in the fields. They would run behind their employers holding umbrellas to protect them from the blazing sun. They were always one step ahead in the deliverance of their work and adept in understanding the need of the owners.

Likewise, there was a helper named Rakisamuthu Devar in my grandfather's house. He was a very devoted worker who took care of the farm and household jobs in a perfect manner. Particularly, he liked me very much and used to praise me often as a well behaved child. When we went out together, I used to sit on his shoulders and enjoy the ride. Until I turned nine, he taught me how to make fans from the leaves of palm trees, prepare fodder for the cattle, rear them with affection and also to remove ticks from their hides. I became naturally affectionate towards animals which soon turned into a good habit of mine.

I wrote a poem named 'The inside of a prickly Jackfruit' in Tamil in honour of this great man Rakisamuthu Devar in the year 1970.. It fetched me a lot of praises in the poets' circle and was published in a Tamil magazine!. I still take pride in talking about him .

All the children from the Kotai street including the kids from the Brahmin community used to play games together. This denoted that there was enough money and peace in their households. The children and the elders of all the communities were living in harmony with each other. If there were any common celebrations in the village, they joined hands and ensured that they were done efficiently.

Now it is time for me to describe the Athazhanallur temple or the Adhimoolaswami temple. It is mentioned in the puranas about 'Gajendra Moksham'. An elephant after its usual offering flowers toLOrd Mahavishnu in the nearby shrine, tried to put his leg into the pond and was forcibly pulled inside by a crocodile. The elephant resisted the pain,

lifting his trunk and praying to the Lord to save him from his misery. He cried telling the lord Vishnu, that he went to draw some water in his trunk only to perform puja for the Lord, and so why this suffering?

Hearing the elephant's cries and sincere prayers, Lord Mahavishnu came instantly and killed the crocodile with his Sudharshana chakra. This event happened in this village. As a testimony, there is a carving of the Gajendra and the crocodile with an opened snout in a large stone still submerged in the temple pond. It is amazing to even think of how such a carving was done in a huge stone under water.

To further add some proof on this event, a Pandian king constructed a temple dedicated to the Lord and anointed Him as 'Gajendra varadhar'. This incident happened around five hundred years ago. Since the elephant addressed the Lord as 'Adhimoola', this name too stuck with the temple lord.

During Fridays and Saturdays, enormous crowds from neighbouring villages like Saattupathu, Harikesavanallur, Veeravanallur, Thirupudaimarudhur and Seeniyavaram visit the temple, in the hope of atoning their sufferings and misfortunes at the feet of the Lord and seek Eternal Blessings.

(Athazhanallur PerumaL depicting Gajendra Moksham)

(Athazhanallur Athimoola Swami Temple gopuram)

CHAPTER-5

AT THE TEMPLE OF SRI SASTHA

An auspicious day was selected to visit the temple of Sri Sastha. Mahadeva Sastrigal spoke to Gargar, "Swami! The Friday of this week is very auspicious. As per astrology, a special star, Panguni Uthiram dedicated to Lord Sastha will appear on Friday. You can visit the temple and perform abhishegam and archanai in the name of everyone in the family with offerings of various fruits and sweet pongal as neivedhyam. Forgive me, for I will not be able to accompany you on Friday. I have to perform a Sashti apthapoorthi Ceremony at Ambai. I also feel that only a few people can fit into the Ambassador car of yours. After finishing the puja, please send me the prasadham. That is enough!"

Gargar agreed with him and asked Lakshmanan to go to Veeravanallur and book a taxi. Usually the family hired a taxi for such occasions from Rajapandian. He was very loyal to the family. He used to drive at a moderate speed explaining the importance and beauty of the places on the way in a manner that would put the listeners into a rapt attention.

The following Friday, everyone was ready at 8 in the morning.

By the time they reach the temple, let us go through a glimpse of Gargar's interesting life history.

It was the year of 1893, where paisas and annas were of importance. Poor people were able to get lentils, tamarind, few brinjals and mustard for four annas to make a tasty sambhar in addition to the rock salt and chillies which were given for free. Though the country was ruled by the British those days, the commodities were of less cost and good quality.

At the age of sixteen, my Thattha (grandfather)Subramanyan Gargar as he was called, was beaten black and blue by his father and own grandfather. For,he had scored very less marks in Mathematics though he passed Matriculation which was considered as one of the highest exams during those times .So, he could not join college which made him pretty upset. Feeling ashamed of himself , Gargar ran away from his house with the meager money he had. No-one saw him leaving. He went to Tirunelveli and had a sumptuous meal at Sri Ramachandra Vilas. He had skipped his food the previous day due to anger. He then went to a pawn shop and traded his silver hip chain for a good price. He went to Chennai by enquiring people and with gusto, boarded a ship to Burma.

His good accent in English, well-built body and high self-esteem took him to Burma and helped him lead a good life. He worked as a bill clerk in a hotel for some time, then switched to some jobs, studied senior

Cambridge which was equivalent to B.A of today. He passed in first class and joined a college. He worked hard to earn in the evening hours. A British Collector was impressed by him and gave his visiting card. He asked Gargar to meet him once he completed his education. This meeting was a turning point in his life, bringing him luck. He obliged to the collector's request and met him at his office. He was given a post and adequate training in the Education Department as ' Inspector of Schools '. His situation and life improved drastically after this.

The name K.V.S Gargar stuck to him officially. He was fondly called so by the collector. He came back to his native village at the age of twenty-two and married his aunt's daughter Lakshmi. He went back to Burma with her. In those days, Burma, Rangoon and Malaya was collectively called as a British Province. He became an officer in the Education department and was conferred an award of F.M.S [Fellowship of Malaya States] which was considered as a high regard. His status improved after this tremendously and he was assigned a separate bungalow, three cars and two London motorbikes.

Within a few years, he was blessed with two sons, Raman and Lakshmanan. They were given the best of education. Twenty –five years went without any significant problem. Then came the Japan war. Fearing the bombing on Burma and Rangoon by Japan, Gargar gathered money in a suitcase and safely landed in Madras with his family. Amidst all these chaos, his pretty wife was stricken with malarial fever. The heavy dose of quinine rendered her with permanent blindness.

Gargar withheld patience during the extreme troubles in his life. He surrendered himself totally to his destiny and came to Athazhanallur Village . He bought around ten acres of land and took to farming. Slowly his situation improved with the help of good devouted labourers and his hard work.

Once the war ended in Burma after four years, he was given a pension of five hundred rupees as an Ex-Officer in the Foreign Services. This money is equivalent to five thousand rupees as of now. He took this

as a gift of his good karma. He started learning Vishnu sahasranamam, Siva stuthi, Thiruvachagam and some divine songs of Great Poet Subramanya Bharathi from Mahadeva Sastrigal. He started doing his daily puja sincerely to the two beautiful Shalagramas ,blessed and given by a Yogi. His sincerity gave him divine strength and his reputation in the village increased.

Now, shall we return to Kalvai? The taxi curved around to the right from Sri Vaikundam towards Kalvai. The kuccha forest road was filled with pot-holes and rocks. Away from this road were two streets assigned for Brahmins and two for farm labourers exclusively. People had to go to Sri Vaikundam for visiting the market. It was five miles away. The place looked desolated and un- developed, and till now , it is devoid of any sign of wealth.

But the popularity of the Sastha temple was escalating. The Sastha idol enshrined is said to be formed on its own. Thus, on Saturdays and the days associated with the special star of the deity which is Uthiram , brought a large outpour of people from all sects from the nearby villages. People came to offer prayers and thanks. The priest was also taken care of in a good way.

In the year 2005, a large Gopuram (Dome) was constructed for Sri Sastha. Along with it, a kitchen and a big hall were made. Four temple bells were also hung as a part of donation. The Kumbhabishekam or Consecration ceremony was performed in grandeur.

Sri Sastha never lets down anyone who prays sincerely to HIM. If anyone forgets their prayers and offerings as promised ,the deity ensures that it was done properly by reminding them in their dreams .

Gargar and his family made the priest arrive from Srivaigundam(a town nearby) for the puja and for offering sweet pongal, various types of fruits, sugar and honey as prasadham. A Holy bath [Abishegam] was performed on the deity and Annadhanam was given to all the people gathered there. Though a few days passed after this trip, the members of the family were feeling happy and kept sharing the experiences of those divine moments often within themselves.

(kalvai Sastha Temple with its grand Mandapam)

6-- YOUNG BABU'S PRANKS

After the visit to the Saastha temple, good things started to happen in the house and in the village…Sampoornam's (Babu's aunty)marriage was fixed suddenly. The Bridegroom's family was from Palakkad (Palghat)and they were awe struck after listening to her melodious voice. The Bridegroom was well educated and had interest in Carnatic music. He was happy to have her in his life and felt that she would bring happiness to the family. He accepted the proposal in a loud voice to his parents and to everyone assembled in that Athazhanallur house. They refused to accept any dowry. The only expectation of boy's parents was to conduct the marriage in that village in a grand manner as a four days event. They expected around 150-200 people to attend the ceremony from their side of the family. They wanted them to be received with a warm welcome, good care and proper arrangements for their stay.

The second happy thing was the improvement of Babu's health .He had gained considerable height and weight for his age. The Ambasamudram doctor asked them to discontinue the medicine. He advised them to feed the child with cow's milk regularly and with an occasional feed of Horlicks as an added diet. He also suggested the intake of well cooked boiled rice along with soft vegetables. The grand parents were happy to hear this.

Gargar bought a healthy cow in the Friday market from Ambasamudram. Everyone in the house started enjoying a tall glass of milk every night.

The third happy news was that the Adimoolaswamy temple received a hefty donation for painting of the walls and the idols of the dome. Uncle Subbiah and Gargar took responsibility for the proper execution of this work due to their experience. The old priest of the temple, Sri Rama Iyengar was very happy to see the work going on in a swift manner. He was elated to see the work for Kumbabhishegam and the cleaning of the well happening while he was still alive. This was because ,for a long while ,he was feeling sad seeing the bad condition of the temple well.

Dry leaves and dust were falling inside the well. The water was supposed to be the source to bathe the Lord and other idols.. After several repeated complaints, a net was put on the top with the effort of Gargar. The priest was finding it difficult to bring water from the Tambiravaruni river which was two furlongs distant, with sixty steps down the temple. His breath would heave up and down after accomplishing this task. He used to bear this suffering thinking that it was his karma acting now and he could bear this pain as it was only a service for his dear Lord. He prayed sincerely to bring an end to this arduous task. He used to sing songs with deep devotion in front of the Sannadhi. A few of his enchanting Tamil hymns are as follows;- (transliterated)

Oh lord Vishnu! Who will tell 'you are a mere stone'
When you had mingled within me!?
By your sweet bow-like Eyes—you
Captured my whole being in your heart?

2—By your Abhaya-Mudra, you are protecting all;
And within a minute destroy our darkness
And lighting our hearts with your brightness!
3—Oh LOrd! When I adore you chanting
And showering hundreds of Flowers
You show your lighning laugh and gradually enter my heart!
Oh mine! Sweet! Who will dare to tell you
You are a mere staunch standing stone?

And he will sing hundreds of stanzas in Tamil like this with full devotion in his heart And tears in his eyes.

when there were less people, he would bury himself in deep meditation, which would gradually lead to the state of Sahaja Samadhi . After meditation,he would bless with raised hands whoever stood before him. His comforting words and remedies for some problems of people immedialtely attracted some crowd towards the temple.

One day, Gargar met him at the temple. " Dear aiyangar Swami!I feel like calling you as AthazhanallurAlwar .just looking at you brings happiness to anyone around here in this village.,yes, they feel this.. According to Vaishnavite tradition, there is no idea of meditation or yoga necessary for a vaishnavite.. The blessings of one's Guru and sincere puja is enough to elevate one towards liberation. This is what I heard during a discourse in theVeeravanallur temple. But it seems that

you get yourself immersed in deep meditation. How is that possible?" Gargar questioned Rama iyengar with curiosity.

The temple priest smiled sweetly. " Whatever they say is not entirely true. Meditation doesn't come with asking. It is karmic and it just happens. Many known Vaishnava saints like Sri Ramanujar, kulasekara Alwar etc are the best example. There is a difference between intellectual knowledge and spiritual experience. This is what you said the other day in this temple. Am I right?" These words surprised Gargar very intently.

Apparently, the Lord decided not to test such a devoted soul anymore. So the temple consecration ceremony paved the way for the solutions of the existing problems. The dirty water in the well was sucked out and the silt was cleared. Pure water started flowing and filling the well. As per the suggestion of the priest, the stone path which often proved to be challenging to the people who wanted to circumambulate the outside sannidhi,during the hot weather , was replaced with cement and other tolerable materials. Sri Iyengar was hugely praised and rewarded for giving such an idea.

At a chosen auspicious date , the Kumbabhishegam was celebrated with a high degree of pomp. Young Babu thoroughly enjoyed the festival running around with his childish language and little pranks. People around were attracted to him. Babu always intently observed the Shalagrama puja done in the house. He had an excellent memory power. Due to this quality, he could recite the slokams and divine songs with very little effort. The entire family was happy to note this .

But things did not stay the same. Maybe due to Saturn's influence, unexpected events happened in the family which shook everyone in that village. What are they?!

(Old house of ‘Gargar Grandpa’- at Sannadhi Street, Athazhanallur)

CHAPTER – 7

A DISTURBANCE IN THE FAMILY

Some evil eye would have befallen this family. Before I turned the age of four,my father Ramji quarreled with his father for some silly reason. He went to his mother and spoke. "Amma! I do not like this place. Also,I donot know how to spend my time. Iam unable to walk two miles to take care of the fields. I asked Father for a motorbike but he is shouting at me. Doesn't he have enoughmoney? Can't he buy one for me?Is his money going to dwindle if he spends for me?" Ramji jumped up and down in anger. Lakshmi Ammal tried to convince him. But, he left home with a few clothes and savings in the middle of the night,without even telling his wife. He took a bus to Chennai and from there, took a train to Delhi. He stayed in a room and found out that there was a recruitment going on for Military. Due to his excellent command of English and healthy physique, he convinced the officers to join the Military. One and a half years passed by.

Meanwhile, the house in Athazhanallur was drowned in sorrow. Lakshmi Ammal kept on crying. "I donot know why my son is so short tempered." Gargar couldn't find a way to pacify Sornam.

"He couldn't even tell his wife before leaving. I was telling him that the condition is not conducive right now. The money was spent in buying seeds and manure . I promised to buy a bike next year. He just does not have enough patience, he is cantankerous!" Though he spoke like this, Gargar sent people to search in Veeravanallur and Tirunelveli. But , the search went in vain. Six months passed by. Their family friend Subbiah requested his friend in Madras to search there. One and a half years passed by without any trace of Ramji. The family went to Kalvai and Nellaiyappar temple to offer their prayers. Nothing happened. If someone broached the topic of Ramji, they had to be evasive in

answering.

Atlast, during the month of June, four soldiers enquired about the place and left Ramji who was in a distraught state. They also gave his earnings, military dresses and clothes. " Sir, until last month, your son was doing fine. But, two months ago, one commander assigned him the duty of taking care of the mortuary. We think he might have seen something in the dark and got scared. He would have been mentally disturbed. All this time, he never shouted or troubled anyone. He used to look up always and keep talking and laughing to himself. He was given premium treatment from special doctors in the Military but there was no improvement in his condition. So, our Commander-in–chief cancelled his posting. We got this address from his bag. If proper rest and medicines are taken, he might return to normalcy."

The Military gave a letter from their doctor along with some colourful tablets. The kind attitude of the soldiers provoked cries from the family. Sornam fainted looking at her husband's condition. She was taken care of.Ramji was taken to the room upstairs and given food and medicine. The soldiers were offered good meals and some money. Gargar asked Rakisamuthu Devar (our servant)to take them to Veeravanallur.

There was a sad turn of events in the family.Lakshman also cried seeing the condition of his brother.Gargar summoned a good Psychiatrist from Ambai and gave special care to Ramji.. Within a month, there was a steady improvement in his condition.

A few days later, Ramji was able to narrate what happened during the duty at the morgue. "Around midnight, a heavily wounded dead soldier came towards me telling that he is not dead but has been kept there. I was shocked. The same incident happened on the second night of my vigil. But when the other military soldiers checked, he was already dead. This started happening every night and I think, my mind got disturbed and confused."

"Ok, whatever happened is now past. You are alive and that is more important .From now on, do not run away in anger". Ramji's parents

consoled him and bought him a Ralle bicycle. He was asked to take care of the fields. "Donot spend your time idle at home. An idle mind is the devil's work shop."Ramji'sfather remarked, which made him laugh. "Appa, I have slowly recovered from the past but you are scaring me talking about the devil again." Everybody laughed and Sornam gave a sigh and said, "Hereafter, please don't leave us alone like this".

"Yes Appa, if you are going anywhere, please tell me atleast". Hearing such words from Babu made the situation lighter. "Babu is a good boy! You have to stay here for your child. I am getting old and my diabetic condition is getting worse." Gargar said.

As if this was not enough, Ramji's brother Lakshman went to Veeravanallur to watch a movie in the night without telling anyone. After the show ,he had to walk through the fields at two A.m. in the night. A loose branch which was swaying vigorously before him broke. Mistaking it for a ghost ,Lakshman shook like a leaf and lost his mind. He was unaware of everything for nearly two weeks. Now the family had to take care of Lakshman and he was brought back to normal within two weeks. People mocked and made fun of the brothers behind their backs.. "Oh what a strange family! One by one is going mad!"

So ,Gargar forced his two sons to do Sandhyavandhanam regularly and asked MahadevaSastrigal to recite LalithaSahasranamam in the evening. Durga Mantram was chanted once in fifteen days and sacred threads were tied around their wrists for protection. Due to continuous chanting ,Babu was able to remember many chants at a much younger age. Whenever Babu was displaying his ability to retain and chant slokas,he was hugged and kissed affectionately by his grandparents.

During the next three and a half years, two more children were born to Ramji. They were named Venkatachalam and Hariharan. The Grandfather in the family was solely responsible for the memory power of the three children and their ability to chant Ramayan and other Sanskrit verses.

(Babu's GrandPa,GrandMa, with young Ramji--,ie. Babu's Father)

CHAPTER-8

FAITH IN DIVINE GIVES STRENGTH

Till Babu turned five,every single day passed by in a daily routine of chantingsand rituals. His father had coffee in the morning and went to the fields in a bicycle.Till he was back home at around ten ,the three brothers used to play marbles, kitipul and top.Some of his friends joined them for a game of Top where many a times, Babu's top would fly like a rocket and hit the other one,breaking it into two.The sound of victory and laugh would reverberate in the neighbourhood heavily.

" Hey! See how Babu , who is so thin, has the strength to break our tops!"All the other children would tease .The child who lost his top would cry loudly and the rest of the crowd would console him. A few days after the incident, Babu would ask for some money from his grandfather. He compensated for the damages by giving the money to them.Getting money from Gargar was not so easy for Babu. He would bargain to learn a few Thirukkural lines or Bharathi songs in exchange for the money. He had an excellent memory power.

The fun times for the children were only until the father was back home.When his cycle bell chimed, all the children flew like sparrows taking their belongings. There would be no trace of activity in that area.

The main reason was fear. If caught, his voice would boom across the street. " Why are the children playing in the mud instead of being clean, sitting before grandfather and focussing on studying ?"

But, the children would never stop playing. They had the support of their grandfather. Gargar would ask his second son Lakshman to keep a vigil forRamji and alert them. Lakshman used to sit on a chair happily and enjoy watching the games. If they fought, he would act as a mediator and resolve their fights. He felt happy doing this.

When Ramji arrived, the children would gather their towels and head towards the river through the back door. It was only thirty steps walk down to the river. The walk was one furlong away ,difficult for the elders to tread on the stone steps. The children would jump the stairs as if their feet were made of cotton. The time spent in the water was another beautiful game for them. The children enjoyed splashing water over one another till their father arrived. Then they would stop their activities and climb over to the river bank wiping off the water and acting as if nothing had happened.

Their mother would smile at them asking how they escaped their father's anger. The children would smile back happily at her though it had become a routine for her to ask the same question every day. Around this time, a hot tiffin of either idli, dosai or onion upma would have been prepared by Gandhimathi Ammal. Lakshmi Ammal never allowed the children to touch the food without reciting the Annapooranislokam. The children would oblige immediately by reciting it quickly and would empty the plates too with the same speed.

It was in his sixth year , when Babu was introduced to the alphabets by a teacher named Dhananjeyan. He guided him by holding his hands while

writing the alphabets in Tamil on a plate of rice. He asked to recite them loudly along with sacred chants.

It was a small school with only five grades. There were only two teachers. The students were also few in numbers. Barely fifty were there. The school was run with the donation given by some rich people and from the meager amount allocated by the panchayat.

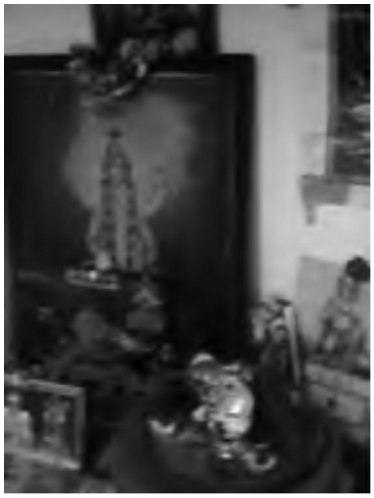
There was a landlord named Ramalingam Pillai who gave rice and money to the teachers. If there was any extra expenditure, they always had Gargar to help. So, there was always an extra amount of care on Babu. The teachers were very patient in listening and answering his doubts. Babu was very enthusiastic in practising maths. He completed the whole year of lessons within three months and asked for more books from the teacher.Gargar felt extremely happy and kissed Babu profusely. He bragged about this to his friends and Mahadevasastrigal.

Sastrigal reminded Gargar of his prediction that Babu would scale to a level of a pundit. Gargar encouraged the children to learn more slokams and read scriptures. So, their knowledge improved with spiritual faith. To add more to it, he bought many story books in Tamil and in English languages like Gulliver's travels, Panchatantra stories, Tom Sawyer and other famous books. He read out the stories to the children and explained it to them in an interesting way, keeping suspenses at intervals. Ramji looked at the children with astonishment. He felt bad that he was not like his children during his young age. He thought to himself that he could have taken his education much more seriously.

Since Babu learnt faster than the other children, he skipped second grade and was promoted to third grade. A fellow student named Gopal was jealous of him and confronted him one day. Babu threatened to report it to the teacher. With anger, Gopal lifted Babu and threw him down, punching him right in his nose. A delicate bone in his nose broke and it started bleeding. A senior student lifted Babu and helped him get back home. He reported the incident to the family. Though Gargar went to Gopal's house and cautioned them of the consequences, the whole family was sorrowful. Gopal was severely punished by his father.

Babu was always sincere and obedient. The reason for his present suffering or injury was unknown . Lakshmi ammal and Sornam sighed. The answer to their worry came to light at around one in the night.

Venkat, Babu's brother shrieked in his sleep at 2 o'clock.. He awoke with a jolt and was shivering tremendously, as if he was stricken with fever. He kept on telling that he saw a white cloudy figure tipping his toes and floating away with a laugh.



(Photo of Lord Mahavishnu and Salagram puja box)

CHAPTER-9

MY THREAD CEREMONY

"Is it not a dream? Answer me properly. We all are scared. Tell it again." Gargar shook Venkat vigorously.

" Yes Thatha [Grandpa]! I was sound asleep when I felt something tipping my toes and laughing loudly. It was a small white figure looking like a boy but didn't have legs. It was talking to me--'Do not fear. I am always in the backyard of this house protecting you all.

Your Grandfather has forgotten to feed me for a long time. Won't I feel hungry? Tell your grandfather to offer me food every month. He will understand. I will leave now.' After conveying this, the figure disappeared into thin air. How is it possible, Thatha?" Venkat enquired eagerly.

"Oh! That was Vellaiyan. He is the helper of Adimoola Perumal. You are very gifted to see him. Don't be afraid. It is just three in the morning now . So, all of you go to sleep. Vellaiyan keeps a vigil on this family. We used to feed him with a grand feast but we have forgotten him for some months. I am sorry.. He has come to remind us . I will ask Sambu Iyer to visit us tomorrow and find a solution for this" .Saying this, he switched off the lights and made everyone retire for the night.

The next day was a Thursday. Sambu Iyer was summoned in the morning without revealing any information on the person who visited them the previous night. Sambu Iyer sat before the kalasam[pot] decorated with coconut and mango leaves on top covered with rice. He rolled some small shells on the floor and removed the coconut and mango leaves. He ran his fingers over the shells and spoke.

"The Person who came was Vellaiyan, your protecting Deity. He is a devoted servant of our Adimoola Swamy. Is it not your duty to take care of him? During my previous visit, I invoked him in the yellow coloured stone at the backyard. Do offer him a feast every month without fail." Sambu Iyer repeated the same words as precisely as Vellaiyan had told Venkat. They were all astonished.

"Yes Swami! What you said was correct. You are a pious person and we cannot hide anything from you. Vellaiyan conveyed the exact words what you said. Is it not, Venkat?" Gargar turned towards Venkat who replied in the positive. Sambu Iyer took the dakshina or money offered by Gargar and asked him to conduct a ritual every month for warding off the evil eye cast upon the children. He murmured that the vision of such small deities to a child is not right. He personally performed a ritual for warding off all negative energies by lighting some camphor on a mango leaf. He chanted a special mantram and asked

Venkat to be careful in future. At that time , his words were not taken very seriously. Iyer also did not insist upon this effectively so as not to put them in fear.

The effectiveness of his words had an impact when we turned into adults. We understood it later. It was in 1968. Venkat did not study beyond S.S.L.C but he was a very religious young man sincere in his rituals. He was working in an Insurance Company in Chennai. Due to wrong acquaintances, inspite of his faith in Divine, he was pulled and misguided into a Planchette or Ouija board. His life was misleaded heavily. After his S.S.L.C, he was unable to concentrate on his studies. Fearing the anger of our father, he ran away from home. For four years, he couldn't be traced out. What happened later will be mentioned in the forth -coming chapters.

Let us come back to the present story. On an auspicious day, a feast was offered to Vellaiyan. Food was offered to nearly fifty people. Rice, turmeric and coins were given off .Suddenly Venkat shouted. " Thatha! See! Vellaiyan is very happy and he says that he is satisfied." Gandhimathi and Gargar stopped him from uttering more and took him inside.

For a year, things went smoothly. We were naughty like before but in front of our father, we behaved well. We focused our attention on our education. No one in the family complained about our naughty deeds to our father fearing he would beat us all. The school in Athazhanallur was not competitive enough. The children were put in a better school called ' The Ambasamudhram Theerthapathi school.' We packed our lunch of curd rice , crossed the river, went through Sathupattu village Agraharam and further walked down three miles to reach the school.

After our lunch in school, we all took a nap under a banyan tree on each other's lap. When the bell rang after forty-five minutes, we scattered like sparrows hit by a stone. For a year, the routine remained the same. During floods, we found it difficult to cross the river. So, we would go in a small circular boat maneuvered by Marimuthu. I was fearless and encouraged the other children to shed their fear and engage

their minds in the beauty around and of the viciously flowing river to the image of Gandhimathi Ammal's hand made Murukku.

Our grandfather knew that it would be risky to travel in a boat if there were heavy floods or we would miss our classes if we took continuous holidays and our mother started worrying about our safety. Our father would ignore her fears by telling that the experience will prepare us for the tough world outside. But, Gargar couldn't stay idle. He managed to admit us in Hindu High School in Veeravanallur. The school was in the east just two and a half miles by a walk across the fields and there were no other hassles.

In the following year, my thread ceremony was planned to happen in a grand manner in our house. I was adamant about cutting my hair and promised to do the rituals regularly if I was spared. But my argument went cold when my father stood near the door. He rolled his eyes and sprang ahead to beat me . But, my grandfather and my mother protected me. She promised to give me Appams[sweet dish] if I cooperated for a day. I was happy and asked for two handfuls of Appams in exchange for my cooperation for the traditional haircut during the ceremony.

The whole scenario changed into bouts of laughter from the people around.

CHAPTER-10

STRANGE DREAM

The auspicious day arrived. I was only nine years old. The sacred thread ceremony was celebrated for two days in a row. RakhisamuthuDevar put a lot of effort in decorating the house and the surrounding areas. There was an instrument called Nadaswaram performed by a highly revered and widely known team from the neighbouring village called

‘Kalakkad’. People from nearby villages flocked just to listen to the divine performance. Sweets and savouries were distributed to the children who gathered at large.

According to our tradition, there is a ritual called Naandhi performed a day prior to the thread ceremony. Venkat, my brother asked me a day before Naandhi. “Anna! Our Gandhimathi Patti[Grandma] has prepared some sweets and savouries for the occasion. She has locked all the boxes in the room. She said she will give them only after the function is over. Can you please ask her to spare some?”. I went straight to my grandfather but he questioned us suspiciously noting down our body language.

“My dear grandsons, why are you all walking as if it is a military parade? Is it because your father is not here?”

“Grandpa! Grandpa! I told you earlier that I will crop my hair only if you give me something to eat. Gandhimathi Patti is not giving us anything to eat.She has locked the store room.Can you order her to give us some snacks or murukku? If she doesn’t obey you, please dismiss her thaththaa.Ok?”

Gargar laughed at the way the request was put before him. He asked them to call Gandhimathi. But she was smart enough to guess the reason ,but obliged to see Gargar. He kept his face and tone in a serious manner. “Patti, if children ask for savories, can’t you give them some? These are not for offering to God. Nothing is more important than providing for our little children. Give them a few”.

Gandhimathi nodded her head(not in a happy mood!)-and gave some sweets(called appam) and savories(like murukku)- as much as we could hold in our tiny hands. We didn’t ask for more, lest our effort would go in vain if our father comes there. Later when our mother came to know of this, she giggled silently and was amused by her children’s smartness.

The Upanayanam (poonool) function went on well and the crowd was astonished by the way everything was performed in such a grand

manner. I was blessed and pampered by everyone including some girls who kissed me on my cheeks. I blushed but also felt ashamed to stand for the rituals in a loin cloth. I was on the verge of tears but my mother pacified me by wiping my eyes.

Lo! I was given the powerful Gayathri Mantra. Subramanya Sastrigal elaborated on the powers of the mantra. "The Mantra is the third eye for the child enlightened with it. If practised regularly Babu!, it bestows good luck, protection and evades the enemies trying to approach him".

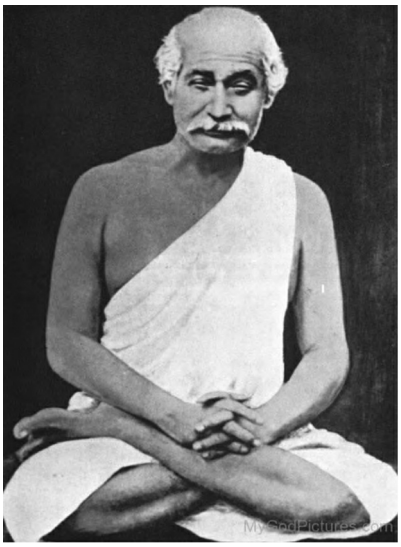
At that young age these words went deep into my heart and gave instant thrill all over my body. I felt that I understood partially what was conveyed by the Sastrigal but made up my mind to ask him in detail about the mantra and its rituals,when he comes home to teach me Sandhyavandhan Japam,for a few days. I felt blessed and fortunate over other children to know that the Upanayanam denotes the second birth of the soul. I stood with my head held high, wiping off my tears of joy which blossomed at the edge of my eyes.

For the next eight days, Sastrigal visited regularly. He explained the meaning of the manthra in a simple manner and taught me the method of chanting. On the final day, he spoke to me. "Babu! Your horoscope says that you will grow up to be a great person and go around the world delivering lectures. But all these will happen only if you are regular in your practices. Do not ever forget this."

Over the next few days, I asked many questions to my grandfather and got beautiful explanations. On the eleventh day when I was doing my pranayamam, a divine current went through my body. All my nerves were shaken ;-- I was intrigued but felt happy immensely. With that thought I fell into a deep sleep.

At that time, suddenly,I saw an old Brahmin man who looked very wise. He was dressed up in a white dhothi and sitting in Padmasan[Cross legged posture]. His eyes were half open. He was slightly bald in the front head and had a white moustache. I was staring intently at him and the Godly man was also gazing at me, smiling and rubbing his

moustache. I started wondering about who he could be and felt drowned in a state of ecstasy for a long time even after I woke up.



(I saw this saint sitting in Padmasana Posture! In my age -9)

CHAPTER-11

THE VILLAGE FESTIVAL

Whenever I was doing GayathriJapam deeply with focus, the Great Man appeared in my inner vision. He did not talk but looked deeply into my eyes which gave me immense pleasure. But, I felt sad as He never uttered a single word.

So, I asked my favourite teacher Mahadeva Sastrigal about my experience. He said,"Hey Babu!You are very lucky to have the blessings of a Great Guru. He might be a great Saint! Maybe He is following you since your previous birth.Whenever He appears in your vision, bow down to Him mentally and in due time, when your practices and maturity grow, He will reveal Himself. Be sure!You have to be patient

till that time arrives."

That day, I learnt from him about rebirth and the ways in which karma theory works. His words astonished me and travelled deep inside my heart.

When I put the same queries to my grandfather, he too expressed similar explanations. He further advised me. "Babu! Do not leave your manthra japam on any account. If that Great Yogi conveys anything, please tell me. I will clarify it."

After this divine experience, I travelled eight miles to and fro with my brothers to study in the Hindu High School. I was studying in eighth standard then. The daily routine of travelling and sitting in front of the bright petromax light in the night to finish the lessons exhausted me . Because of my father's strict schedule, we had to get up at 5.30 in the morning, revise the lessons and do the pending home-work.

After bathing in theTamirabharani river, we would have our breakfast and leave to school by 8 a.m. Our father used to mock us. "Hey children! You never forget to take your lunch boxes, but have you kept all your books according to the time table?" The sarcasm used to hit us like a heavy ball thrown by an experienced bowler. Swallowing the unhappiness, we would answer "Yes, father!" and run outside with a sensation of relief from his clutches.

As we walked through the green grass paddyfields, we used to enjoy the beautiful scene all around. The small worms, the dance of the mynahs and the sparrows which would flock to feast on these little worms and grains would amuse us. At times, the women folk working in the fields would mock us.

"Hi Parvathi! Look at these Brahmin kids! They are very smart and eager to go to school. See our own children! They are very stupid and stay in the same class for two to three years. Our kids deserve only to rub the benches!" A sigh would accompany the remarks everytime.

But my brother Hari would laugh at them loudly and comment, "So what?.. The school benches will become clean and their trousers will also tear". The labourers would try to hit us but we would run far beyond their reach. Though our days were spent happily like this, one day we complained to our grandfather.

"Thatha! We are unable to walk eight miles daily. By the time we open our books to study, sleep envelops us due to tiredness. Though we try to keep ourselves awake fearing the anger of our father, we are just acting as if we are studying but unable to concentrate. We know that you are getting a decent pension. Why don't you buy a single bullock cart like our friend Rangan has. We assure you that we will get first class in all subjects. I will also guide my brothers in learning. Please convince our father, Grandpa!"

Even before I could finish the sentence, our father appeared on the scene. "Hey kids! What are you demanding from your grandfather?" He questioned harshly. Even though our little bodies trembled by his sudden appearance, our grandfather came to our rescue.

"Ramji! Why are you always harsh with your children? To whom will they share their sufferings except to us? They were asking for a single bull driven cart. You need not spend your money. I will give from my pension. Consult your Subbiah uncle who has bought one for his grandson Sankaran.. Babu assures that he will get good marks and help his brothers also in their studies. Do what I say. O.k?"

Our father couldn't disobey his words.He agreed to buy one, but later went to my mother. "Sornam, your son Babu is very smart. He knows very well that his demand for a cart will not materialize through me. So, he has spoken in such a manner as to convince his grandfather."

"Oh! Is it? I didn't know this." Our mother replied as if she was unaware of what was happening at home. But, later she praised us for our smartness. It's true ! A mother always remains a mother in any situation.

But the idea of buying a bullock cart remained a dream for us. Within three days , our father got a job as a Go-down keeper in Central Bank of India in Tuticorin under heavy recommendation. His stay was arranged in a nearby room through our distant relation , Mr. Seetharama Iyer. Though we felt happy to escape from the clutches of our father, we equally felt sad for not getting the cart. Sensing our mood, our grandfather tried to cheer us up.

"Don't put long faces, kids! When your father comes for a three day visit during the holidays next month, I will make sure you get the cart."

Meanwhile, the yearly festival of Krishna Jayanthi was due for celebration. It was an annual festival in that village. All the streets embraced the celebrations. Heavy donations were collected in that year. With enthusiasm, I asked, "Grandpa! Will there be Uriyadi festival[hitting the pots with sticks], Vazhukkumaram[strong men competing with each other to climb the heavily oiled stump to grab the gift tied at the top] and Chokkapanai[Palmfire] be conducted this year too? Please give details of the festival." Our grandfather immediately started describing this with much interest.

"My dear children! Our Hindu culture believes in celebrating festivals together,.. irrespective of caste or creed. Though some villagers migrate to other places for their livelihood, their souls are tied to the soil of this village. The smell of the dust creates a divine pleasure in them. When I was young, during the month of January, called as 'Thai' month in Tamil, 'Kodaivizha' was celebrated every year for the Goddess . Though we are old now, I still remember the 'Karagattam' of many girls.. [dancing with pots on their heads] vividly.

There is no special stage set for the dances. In the middle of the ground, many long bamboo sticks with space between them will be tied up in a square shape with the help of huge ropes. Tubelights covered with colored paper will be tied around the poles. Within the aura of bright lights, the Karagattam folks will perform. People will sit around,outside the poles to watch the performance. Few girls and men will ride fake ponies with pots on their heads. A parrot doll will be tied

on top of each pot.While they dance, the parrots will appear to move sideways. Though they sing and dance energetically to the tunes, without any support, the pots will stay on their heads firmly, and it is a beautiful sight to look at. It comes with extreme training and mastery. There will also be Double Thavil, Double Nayanam and Damaru. Lots of hidden meanings of their songs will be floating around the dancers which give more enthusiasm among the young and old alike. You don't need to know about it right now. There will be many tea shops, petty shops and gambling going on. The whole atmosphere will be charged with some vibrations."

I interrupted my grandfather who was reminiscing his young days. "Yes Thatha! I remember seeing the Karagattam last year when it was celebrated in Kottaistreet-Mariyamman temple. The lady danced skillfully without letting her pot fall. Everyone was very happy".

Our grandfather continued. "Very good Babu. Now listen further. There will also be stalls selling lemonade, juices, ice-cream, ginger flavoured drinks and many varieties of sweets and savouries like murukku and sweet puffed rice balls at cheaper rates. Old people like me will be narrating the importance of the celebrations to the young children around them. As if that's not enough, there will be Aali dolls [Giant hollow dolls with men and women inside] going around everywhere dancing and asking for money. Tomorrow, there will be festivities in the temple too. Lord Perumal (through our Archagar,)-will begin the celebrations. Then He will appear with a plate full of butter in one hand and embrace His Consort Lakshmi with the the other hand. Various Prasadhams[offerings] like butter, Tulsi water, butter-milk and sweet pongal will be distributed to the devotees. Your father is also not here. So enjoy everything to your fullest and narrate every detail to me." He continued.

'Be careful during the Chokkapanai. The embers will fly everywhere and the crackers will burst unexpectedly. So keep yourself away from the fire. It has become dusk. Babu! Do Sandhyavandhanam now. Do 108 Gayathri japams as it is a Sunday today. If the Saint comes in your dreams, don't forget to tell me". Saying so, he arranged his

pillows properly and laid his back.

I replied with an enthusiastic 'yes' grandpa!. We all went to the cowshed at the back of the house . I stroked a cow gently and asked our Kamadhenu to save us from all dangers. Then I sat for the Japam unmindful of the shocking incident yet to occur the next day.

(karagattam, and idol dance)

CHAPTER-12

THE MISTURN OF EVENTS

It was Janmashtami , also called as Krishna Jayanthi. We were very excited. We took a bath, had our breakfast and rushed to the temple of Adhimoolasawami there at the end of our street.

Our Mother, Sornam warned us. "Be careful, my children. There is going to be a dense crowd in the temple. Do not forget to put the money in the Hundi [Offering box]. Pray for your all-the first rank in coming exams,..while doing so. Then you can do whatever you want".

After answering 'yes' hurriedly to her, and taking permission from our grandfather, we ran to the temple.We watched the rituals with interest. Then the priest asked us to sing some songs about the deity as he felt our voices were good. I started singing 'Saanthakaaram', the slokam of VishnuSahasranamam and my brothers followed. We sang in a loud voice. The priest gave special attention to us by giving Tulsi leaves and an extra serve of pongal in a big leaf.

Our grandfather was unable to walk to temple. So, he gave eleven

rupees for a special Archanai in the name of the deity a day before, through our uncle Lakshmanan. Seeing us in the temple, Lakshmanan rushed towards us and hugged us all. He asked us to follow him to the small Narasimha temple which was built near the steps to the river.

"Come with me, kids!The priest will now cover Lord Narasimha with sandalwood paste all out His body, and perform a special puja. It will be very beautiful to look at. After partaking the prasadham of sweet pongal and lentils, we can go back home".

But we refused to go home after that. We wanted to have a look of the special events associated with the palm fire.Our uncle laughed at our enthusiasm. "My dear children..! All these events are going to happen only in the evening after five o'clock. First of all, the Lord will be taken around the temple in a palanquin and placed in a special area. Then the aarthi will be performed along with hymns and songs. Now we have to go home to attend Lord Sri Krishna puja there . Your grandfather is getting ready. We have to be there.".. Though we all felt disappointed, I tried to elevate the mood of my brothers. "Ok Hari, we will cancel the game of marbles and come back here around 4.30 in the evening ok?"

Our uncle took a big box of prasadham and we all rushed home. The puja was celebrated elaborately with uttering of sacred chants and Vishnu Sahasranamam. ..Gandhimathi Amma exclaimed in surprise. "These children are so responsible and are chanting without doing any mischiefs. I think it will rain today".

" Patti!" I shouted. "Don't utter the word 'Rain'. We want to see the palm fire event today." Lakshmi Ammal happily responded to this. "Oh…Is it? So that is the reason for your disciplined behaviour!". She laughed. After the puja, everyone got their share of a variety of eatables in the name of Lord. We all dozed for a while listening to Balakrishna Leelas narrated by our grandpa.At around four, I woke up with a start and immediately woke up my brothers. We washed our faces, changed into new clothes and rushed to the temple like sparrows.

We reached the temple soon but found out that the priest was

removing the morning 'alankaram' in a slow pace. He asked us to come after half an hour. "You all can go and play outside near the big Banyan tree. Watch out for the sweet chirping of parrots. After half an hour, you can come and watch the abhishekam and decoration of our Lord in a palanquin. After that there will be sixteen types of aarthi and dances like kolattam[with sticks], Aaliyattam[with effigies] followed by Chokkapanai [burning of palm leaves using fireworks]. You all can go home after that." He smiled and spoke to us very kindly.

"Ok Uncle!" We replied in unison and started playing the game of train ,..holding each other from the back. Towards the south of the temple , there was a huge banyan tree. On it were many colourful parrots chirping happily and playing with each other. We felt that one of the parrots called us "come" in Tamil language. Half an hour passed by . One of the helpers in the temple came to call us inside. We ran to the sanctum after washing our feet and hands.

The priest performed the rituals and the Lord was made to sit on the palanquin of Lord Garuda, who is the vehicle of the Lord. The sacred conches were blown and with a background of beautiful music and rendition of 'Divyaprabandham', the Lord was taken for a circumambulation. The rhythmic beats of the drums and chants took me into a trance instantly. I was unaware of the surroundings and my brothers held my hands tightly and took me with them.

In the SannidhiStreet, a coconut tree was deeply rooted in the centre and around it,lots of palm leaves were wound tightly. A priest representing the Lord took a torch and went near it. With the surrounding voices calling out "Arohara", he planted the torch right in the middle of the leaves. He moved backwards and cautioned everyone to move away. The 'Chokkapanai' started to burn like a wild fire. The crackling sound was deafening and the flames from the burning of the dried leaves soared high like an Eagle's wings and fell everywhere, burnt.

I was in an unexplainable emotion and kept moving forward and backward in the crowd. Though I was cautious, a small ember fell on my

elbow causing terrible pain. The giant glow of the fire before me resembled a volcano. It triggered a similar fire inside me and I fell unconscious. Luckily I was saved from hitting the ground by RakhimuthuDevar. He carried me home in his hands and placed me in front of my Grandfather. A glass of water was splashed on my face.Everyone was worried. My mother and others peered over my wound. The untoward incident had left a small blister on my arm. My mother brought an ointment(called-Borida)- and applied soothingly on my wound. Tears were flowing from her eyes. Looking at her, I asked," What happened Amma? Where am I? I didn't see the Chokkapanai till the end." This was making me cry even more than the pain in hand - burn.

Seeing me crying made my brothers very emotional. "Thatha! We didn't know that this would happen." Gargar pulled the two children closer and comforted them.

"Didn't I repeatedly ask all of you to be careful? Inspite of my warnings, this has happened. By God's blessings, it is only a minor burn. No one should cry.Leave it." He consoled everyone. Rakhisamuthu Devar was given some savouries for his timely help. Gandhimathi Ammal applied ghee on the wound twice daily. The pain subsided and the wound started to heal gradually within three days.

Our Grandmother, Lakshmi Ammal called us. "From now on, you all should be careful and try to reduce your naughty behavior and pranks"." Yes, Grandma! We will try to reduce it to some extent!." We replied and laughed in chorus. Our mother couldn't control her laughter and laughed aloud at our wit, unmindful of the presence of her Mother-in –law. Lakshmi Ammal was annoyed but our mother apologized immediately for her act.

The following week brought our father home. He was very upset listening to what had happened in his absence. He scolded me for being an example for the mischievous actions of my siblings. He had come on a four day leave. He went with Subbiah uncle to Ambasamudram and procured a small cart and a young bull. Rakisamuthu Devar helped

them choose and drove them back home. With his guidance, we learnt to drive the cart within a week.

Two months went by with lots of fun. We learnt the art of driving the cart. We took good care of the bull by giving him water and food whenever needed. Till our classes were done, he was tied to a tree, in a shade. Once school got over, the young bull took us home in twenty-five minutes. We were able to give more attention on studying without feeling tired at all.

Our grandparents praised us a lot as we scored well in the half-yearly exams , as promised. We were all happy but things changed as fate has planned otherwise! The three months of driving a cart came to an abrupt end.

One evening , while returning home,Venkat, my brother did a mischievous prank (on the buttoks of the young bull)which pushed the cart into a small pit nearby. The bull also fell into the pit in an upturned position with one leg in the air and another on the ground . It looked as if it was in Sage Viswamithra'sTrisangu world. The bull was crying in pain and our loud screams in the deserted place seemed to melt the core of the passing wind.

(Palm Fire Festival before the Temple)

CHAPTER-13

WHERE DID MY FATHER GO?

Subbiah Uncle happened to pass by the road where our cart met with the accident. He was on his way back from Veeravanallur after making some purchases. He asked Devar to stop the cart and asked the crying children to come over to him. He consoled them, rescued the bull and tied it to his cart. He made the bull follow the cart which he drove by himself. He asked Devar to bring two strong men from the nearby jasmine grove by offering ten rupees each. Somehow Subbiah Uncle managed to bring the broken cart to the village. He explained the mishap in detail to Gargar telling vividly about the KURUMBU(mischief)of venkat, my younger brother.. Though he was shocked, Gargar called the children who were crying and applied some ointment on the wounds.

"Do not cry, my dear children.. Tell me. Is it right to tease the bull?It is also a young one like you.Why did you do this Venkat? Your elder brother Babu was riding the cart efficiently, I suppose. Now see what has happened. The two months of luxury of riding in a cart is gone now. In half an hour, your father is going to arrive here. Already, he had to resign a good job he got in Tuticorin. He will come from the river after a bath now. I presume you all are going to get good thrashings from him. Hmm.. Who can save you all from your own karma!" Hearing our Grandfather say such words, We three felt terrible pain in our stomachs. Drops of tears from our eye- balls were beginning to pour on the floor.

We all got panicked and started chanting some slokas to seek Divine help. But, we know well that nothing could stop our father. He appeared to be like a fierce tiger released from the captivity. He came inside wiping his head with a towel. We were trembling with fear but our mother put her hands around us as a protection.

"What happened? The children seem to be bruised heavily. Babu! Answer me! You are the leader for the other children and also for all mischief.. What did you all do? Did you bring this upon yourselves? Huh..!" When the Father tiger roared, I started telling what had

happened that day, with tears and stammer. But by the time,I arrived at the naughty act that Venkat did, he himself intervened thinking that his elder brother will take the crime upon him.

"Appa, this is my mistake..I didn't know why I did it but don't punish others for my bad deed!" His voice was shaking. Immediately our father pulled Venkat and gave some tight slaps. "This is required for all of you. I warned your Grandpa not to give you all too much lenience. You all are not fit to ride acart . Now see, how much loss you have incurred for your Grandfather? Let him understand. From now on, you will go to school on foot.Only then, you all will realize." Saying this he moved away to fill his big round belly!.

But our Grandfather seemed to be unperturbed. "It's ok kids! Don't keep on thinking about this again and again and lose your concentration on your studies. If you do so,..you all will get more beatings from your father. Be careful". After this, he completely forgot about the incident. He seeked help from Subbiah uncle to repair the cart and sold it along with the bull.

He later mentioned it to his wife and Sornam that Ramji suppressed his job- issue a lot . When our father was in Tuticorin, he was asked by his Bank Manager to assist in a wrong doing in respect of godown stocks of a big customer..instead,..he shouted back at the manager and resigned the job immediately without any second thought. Gargar now felt that his son's continuous bad temper like this was not going to get him a job anywhere.

Soon after this incident,within two months, an argument ensued between the two brothers ie. Raman and Lakshsman,regarding the sharing of the properties. It all started like this. A good marriage proposal came for Lakshmanan uncle. The Bride's family was in AYIKUDY village near Tenkasi and was willing to continue with the alliance if the groom (Lakshman)-had a property in his name. So, keeping a small portion for himself, and with a large heart, Gargar decided to share the rest between his two children. He wanted to do this while he was still alive and proceeded with the arrangements with the help of a lawyer.

But, our Father disliked this idea and argued that he needed a little more portion in his name as he had a big family to support. All these happened in front of the lawyer. When his argument was not fruitful, he kept quiet till evening,..and then left home with a suitcase and an umbrella in that fateful rainy night. The whole family was unaware of his decision and was in a deep sleep in the middle of the night. Our grandfather was already suffering from diabetes and his condition worsened after this. He became lean and confined to his bed.

CHAPTER-14

MY FATHER'S WHEREABOUTS!

With my father's sudden disappearance and my grandfather's illness, my mother got plunged into grief. My Uncle Lakshmanan's position was in a soup. He feared that whether his marriage will be turned down;.. He also got worried that the girl's family will take the disappearance of his brother as a bad sign. But, things did not go awry for him as a piece of property was registered immediately in his name by our grandfather. Now, with a large heart,(!)- the bride's family agreed to celebrate the marriage in their village named Ayikudi during the month of January.

The marriage was celebrated in a grand manner. On the third day after marriage, the bride Janaki was brought to Gargar's home at Athazhanallur.. MahadevaSastrigal came on a casual visit to enquire about the event. After greeting him with sweets and savouries, a thought arose in Gargar's mind. He wished to ask Sastrigal about his son's where-abouts, by the divine method of 'Prasnam'. Sastrigal immediately agreed. He closed his eyes and started chanting the Devi Mantram. He rolled some small white conch shells , which were hitherto idly sleeping in his waist-bag ,..on a mat.

"Gargar Swami! Your son did not run away somewhere. In fact, he is in the north and had planned everything properly beforehand . He was

trying for jobs and when the right one clicked, he left. It is not because of the argument with you. Please change your mind.. He is safe and is in a good job now . This is my Guru's and my Deity's words. You had said earlier that he had signed the required documents before leaving, believing that you will somehow register them. So, don't worry and I will leave now".

The human mind works in funny ways. If something negative happens, it spins various thoughts and gets entangled in them. Even if God appears and guides them, it travels through the end of worries till a ray of happiness appears.

My Uncle Lakshmanan was very happy. He kept buying sweet candies and groundnuts for us,.. the children. Our aunt Janaki was very efficient in her work and everyone in the family started liking her. Her humorous nature kept the happiness in the family afloat in spiteof my mother's pitiable condition. Aunt Janaki spoke with confidence to my mother.

"Akka! Believe me. I am an ardent devotee of Hanuman. A letter will come from Athimber within the month of April. He should have gone on an important job. Last month, I was cleaning some shelves in upstairs.. I came across a receipt from Calcutta. Though the paper was very crumbled, I could make out what was written. Athimber would have definitely gone there for a big job. His anger will disappear soon and you will get a letter from him." Her voice sounded as if it came from a divine source.

Exactly in the month of April, a letter from my father arrived though it had very less contents. He had addressed the letter to his father. He had enquired about his brother's marriage and ensured that he was working hard in a big iron and steel company as an Accountant.. He had sent a photo of himself sitting on a chair with two telephones on his table. After reading the contents, we all felt relieved. It looked as if a big chunk of heaviness was removed now from our hearts.

Now the gossip in the village could be dealt with a solid

answer. Was it not? Our aunt Janaki's faith in Lord Hanuman was highly praised. I hugged her telling that she had become smart like me! Hearing my naughty comments all laughed. Once again happiness started prevailing in the house. Our mischief doings increased day by day.

But, something was bothering my heart. I was the oldest child in the family. So, the responsibility of taking proper care of my grandfather fell on my shoulders. Whereever I was, studying or playing, I had to help my sickly grandfather often to see and wait till his commode filled up with smelling water.. After that, I had to carry the commode to the backyard very carefully without spilling its contents and then clean it thoroughly. Though the whole family appreciated my efforts and kind nature, within six months, I started feeling a sense of aversion and weariness. I used to pacify myself that my uncle was also sharing this task when I was in school.

Uncle Lakshmanan used to console me. "Look Babu! We have to do this as our duty and responsibility. This is our service to grandpa. Then who will do all this? We should not hesitate to do service to elders.. God will surely help us in future. You should believe me. Is it not?"

Inspite of his consoling words , I felt very down and depressed one day. Without even playing, I ran to the river bank and sat on a stone step. Tears started flowing profusely. An old man suddenly walked down the steps and touched my shoulders from behind."Why are you crying my child? Please tell me". The kindness in his voice made me look up. Though he was looking frail, his face shone with radiance. His hands were long and palms were huge. His eyes were pouring out lot of love and mercy..

He caressed my hair affectionately. I started to tell everything which gave pressure to my mind. "Though I know it is my duty towards my grandfather, sir, I feel aversion day by day ,and cannot control myself. I am unable to relish my food with joy now a days.".

"Do not worry, my child! You will be soon freed from this duty in

another two months. Bear with patience and imagine that Lord Hanuman is residing inside you and He is only doing this duty. Don't think you are doing! Everything happens in our life for a reason. Just wait and see! Your memory power is going to increase. You are going to get more marks in all the exams. Not only that! In future, you are going to work in a big job and also get a good name by talking on stages in Tamil. You have the Blessings of Goddess Saraswathi. She will appear in your visions then and there,and bestow super knowledge in you.".

The old man spoke breathlessly and planted kisses on my cheeks and held my hands. I experienced a surge of power through my body. I also felt a mild tremor in my being.

Meanwhile, darkness was spreading fast. I thanked him and promised to follow his words. I prostrated at his feet. When I got up, He was nowhere to be seen. I could not perceive what was happening . 'Is it a dream or was he a Yogi who came?'

This experience at a very young age left me baffled. I didn't disclose this to anyone but kept on thinking about it. But, I strongly believed that his words will materialize someday, only if it was kept a secret. After a few days, the same old Yogi appeared in my dream with a smile. He asked me whether I was satisfied. I kept meditating on his form for a long time. I felt happy and could feel a surge of happiness in my nerves.

CHAPTER-15

LIFE IN VEERAVANALLUR

After the encounter with that saintly oldman, I started helping my grandfather enthusiastically. If he called me even in the midnight, I helped him without hesitation. I imagined each time the vision of Lord Hanuman in my mind.This gave me additional strength and could do the help or service, with a smile on my face. My grandfather was also surprised by my changed behaviour but didn't question me. Two months went by.

One day, my maternal grandfather died suddenly of Asphyxia. His house was in Sannadhi Street. We three kids didn't feel much grief as he never treated us kindly. He used to command us always, and never gave us even a single anna to spend. Even during Diwali, he never gave us a sumptuous amount to buy fireworks. Whatever he gave used to be a petty amount like only one anna (now equivalent to 5 paise)-and we used to return it, mock him and leave. It was a childish expectation then.

That same day, one of our relatives asked our uncle Lakshman, to send a telegram to our father at Calcutta informing him about the death of his father-in-law. After three days, our father came with heavy luggage and a sad look and went directly to see his father. He was shocked to see him alive,and shouted at him. "Who sent this telegram that you are dead? I resigned my job in Calcutta and came here once for all. Who did this?" His whole body shook with anger.

Lakshmanan Uncle came out and stood in front of him. He looked at the telegram and found that it was typed as father instead of father-in-law. It was the post office clerk's mistake. But our father was not convinced. "Where was your brain? Is it not your duty to check the telegram before sending? What will I do now in this small village? Tell me, father?" No one could answer his questions. So our father Ramji said angrily that it was Lakshmanan's responsibility to take care of our grandfather and that he would shift to Veeravanallur immediately with his own family. He declared that he would get a job at his friend Gopal Iyer's bank there

. The children could also study there with no hassles to travel.

“Please send me some money from my share of land along with some rice. Is it okay, appa?” Without even waiting for a reply, he left to take a bath in the river. This turn of events gave some uneasiness in our tummies. My mother was also deeply disturbed and we all burst into tears. But, our grandfather looked at our mother and spoke kindly.

“Don’t worry, Sornam! When has he stuck to a job permanently? It has become his nature. Due to his experience in Calcutta, he will surely get a job in that small bank in Veeravanallur. Additionally, I will give some money from the amount we would get after selling off the grains. You both can manage there in an excellent way and I will give you some extra amount separately and secretly to you. . Spend this on your children and keep them happy. Take care of Babu. He is the one who is going to take care of everyone in the future. He will grow up to be a good person. He has lots of blessings from the divine and the saints.” His voice was very soft and subtle.

We shifted to Veeravanallur in the mid of November. We got a suitable house in Perumalsannadhi street. We bid farewell to our dear grandfather amidst sobs. We were worried about him but our mother convinced us.

“ Dear children! The troubles that we are experiencing are nothing compared to what your grandfather underwent at his young age. He left the country with only a light silver hip-chain but with tons of confidence. He made a better life for himself and for us too. There is no use crying and losing confidence. We should face and fight life with strength from the inside.” She cheered us up and narrated some stories to keep us occupied during our journey.

Once we were in Veeravanallur, I started listening to stories from the Bhagavadham from my mother. I also spent a good amount of time in the library and narrated stories to my brothers and my mother in an interesting way during the night.Sometimes, my father also listened and felt happy but never praised me. He used to share his happiness and

pride with his wife.

We all passed our S.S.L.C, ninth and eight classes respectively. My brothers never went to seek the help of our father when they had doubts in any of the subjects. I helped them whenever they had trouble in understanding some concepts. One day, my father asked me to get extra coaching in Hindi. It was very benevolent of him to do so. He wanted me to learn from Sharma sir (our school teacher)-and then teach my brothers. In that way, he could save some money and also wanted us to score bettermarks in Hindi exams. Like Prathamic, Madyama ,Rashrabasha etc.

My Hindi teacher praised me for getting good marks and also in helping my brothers. After shifting to Veeravanallur, our opportunity to be naughty was zero to none. We didn't get to eat expensive vegetables like cabbage, potatoes and a few other English vegetables. If any marriage ceremonies happened, it was our chance to relish. Our father never attended the functions giving some silly reasons but used to send us with our mother giving some money to offer as a gift.

Our happiest time-pass was swimming across the pond in the western side though it was very deep. We swam happiy upto the middle of the pond,collected a few pebbles from a small construction in the middle of the pond called as 'Alwarmandapam'. We boasted to our friends by showing off those pebbles collected and boasted that we can even go beyond that Mandapam!. All these happened only in the absence of our father's sight there.. We also made some secret trips to see our grandfather by cycling down three miles to Athazhanallur. Our fortnightly visits were funded by the money given by our mother. This gave us immense satisfaction and we were able to perform well in academics.

Our secret getaways came to an abrupt end in the form of a vegetable seller, a lady who appeard like that Ramayan kooni called Mantharai!

Yes! Venkat and I bore the brunt heavily on our hands and legs!

CHAPTER-16

AT THE COLLEGE HOSTEL

The old lady with her heavy basket laden with vegetables walked in an aimless manner towards us. Though I applied the brakes immediately, the cycle hit her and her basket fell down. The vegetables rolled in the dusty road. She became very angry and started hurling abusive words towards us. We tried to calm her but she remained uncontrollable. Finally, my brother Hariharan said. "Paatti!Somehow the cycle hit you. It is not anyone's fault. We have only five rupees. Please take this and don't complain to our father.He will skin us alive." The old lady murmured under her breath and took the money promptly but didn't fail to report the incident dramatically to our father with the highlights of crying.

As soon as he heard about the incident, our father didn't wait to enquire about it and thrashed us heavily.. He gave five rupees to her as compensation and tried to console her.Then he turned towards us and told..

"If I find you all riding the cycles to see your grandfather hereafter, I will thrash you into pieces. This is a warning to your mother also.She is the one who pampers you by giving the money for the bicycle." His words came out like an alarm bell.

Thus the cycle episode also came to an abrupt end. We were very sad and our pocket money was also cut. But Lakshmanan uncle came every week to comfort us and report the condition of our beloved grandfather. We were also getting a handful of warm roasted peanuts on his each visit.

Our routine was to take bath in the Veeravanallur pond and visit the temple of SundararajaPerumal. After worshipping the deity and ringing the temple bells loudly, we stood before the priest , also named Sundararajan. He was a good friend of our father and used to give us a liberal amount of pongal prasadham. We ate there, washed our hands

and came back home. Our mother knew this routine and kept it as a secret. The priest also never spoke to our father about this. Everyone in the village knew about the temperamental nature of our father.

Summer arrived soon. A ban to bathe in the river was imposed upon by the panchayat. The period lasted for three months, from May till July and was implemented very effectively. Our father called us one day. "Children! From tomorrow, get up at 5.30 am and walk to the Tamirabharani river in the east to take bath. It is around two and a half miles from here. But, you should be back home by 7.15. AM. If you give any excuses, you will be facing punishment. This is a warning." On hearing this from our father, we got extremely happy and decided to put this into action the next day itself without facing a bucket of water thrown on our face early in the morning.

We woke up at 5.15, grabbed our towels and called our mother announcing that we were ready to leave. Our mother knew that the loud calling was meant for their father. She laughed silently.

The morning routine gave us a practice of walking and swimming. My mother also felt happy to see that the children were spared from the strict routine of their father. On some days, we finished our bathing soon and went to the Lord Siva temple situated on the way to our home. Being conscious of the time, we used to ask for the time to the temple priest. He always used to give us a mischievous smile and tell us that it was not 7.15 yet.But I doubly ensured whether he was speaking the truth by looking at his watch closer. I wanted always not to get punished by our father. Being the first child, I always felt that I should protect my brothers. We spent some time on the steps of the temple pond by chatting.

One day, my brother Venkat put a question. "Babu Anna! You are very good at narration. Can you please tell the story of this beautiful temple? Look at the Gopuram, how beautifully it is constructed! The pond is looking good with protection from the dust on all the sides with mandapams."

I replied, "Brothers! Yesterday, I read the history of this temple from the book which the priest gave me. It is quite interesting. Listen! The name of the deity is Bhoominadhar and that of the Goddess is Maragadhambikai. The temple's sacred tree is Punnai. Around eight hundred years ago, a Pandian king constructed this temple. You can see their large heart by looking at the big area around the temple. The pathway is also constructed well. The beautiful grassy pathway is still maintained well by the temple chief. Since the trees and plants are taken care of so well, the whole area around the temple is always cool. I think you both know the story of the Sage Markandeya. Lord Yama got kicked out by Lord Siva when he tried to covet the soul of Boy -Sage Markandeya. Fearing Siva, Yama transformed himself into a creeper and lay here. So, his work got interrupted. Bhoomadevi could not bear the weight of the increasing number of living beings. She came to this sacred place and worshipped Lord Siva. He forgave Yama and everything returned back to normal. Since Bhoomadevi worshipped Him, Siva is known as Bhoominadhar here.O.k?"

"This temple is very famous in the Tirunelveli district. During spring, the rays of the sun will spread on the head of the Lingam. Particularly, during the morning of Mahashivarathri , around 6.15-7.00, this miracle happens. People take bath in the Tamirabharani river and flock here to have a darshan of the Lord."

"There is good bus facility to this place from Tirunelveli, Cheranmadevi and Ambasamudram. Those who come in their own vehicles can do so by coming from Mukkoodal, crossing the river bridge.Those who come from Veeravanallur travel 5 kms to reach here. I think I have explained it exactly as mentioned in the booklet. Now it is time. Let us go home." We all started walking swiftly.

During summer time, we three spent a lot of time in the river bank, washing our clothes and changing into new trousers and running around joyously. Our father allowed us to play from 5 to 7 in the evening. After 7, we would come back home , clean ourselves and recite VishnuSahasranamam before the lit lamp. Though our father raised us

in a military discipline,he allowed us to play in the evening. It improved our health and memory power. This paved the way for my excellent score in S.S.L.C in all subjects and first rank in Hindu High school and subsequently gaining top rank in the Tirunelveli district. This eventually fetched me a silver medal from the District Collector.

Everyone praised me a lot including my father. I had set an example for the other children. After my S.S.L.C, I joined the M.T.T Hindu College which was sixteen miles away in Tirunelveli. I had to walk two miles to reach Veeravanallur station and from there, take a train to Tirunelveli, get down at Pettai station and again walk 1.5 miles to reach the college.

The long travel affected my health and my mind. Though the medium of instruction was in English, I passed in all subjects but secured very low marks. My father and grandfather were worried a lot about me.

"Do not beat him, Ramji! Since there is no power in your place, Babu had to study in the hurricane lamp after he arrived tired from college. His portions of studies have also increased. Also, everything is in English language. What can he do? Let him join the hostel. I will give the money for the hostel payment."

Due to my grandfather's pressure, my father accepted the idea and put me in the hostel in the month of July. I sent a postcard to my grandfather early before that explaining my difficulties. I was very happy that he took my words seriously and found an immediate remedy for it.My respect towards him grew boundlessly.

So, I promised my father on the day I joined the hostel,"Thanks, Father! Just wait and see! I will secure about 85% in all the subjects in the second term."

"O.k! Do what you promised just now. It will be helpful for your higher education." My father replied. I kept my promise by securing 87% and securing 95% in Sanskrit. My college Principal gifted me with an expensive pen for my performance.

Usually in the evening in the hostel, after having a light tiffin and coffee, I would go to a secluded place surrounded by trees to study. The atmosphere was beautiful and my friends never bothered me during such time. Putting efforts to achieve something great is essential, Is it not?

But, each day didn't pass smoothly as expected. Suddenly, I got inflicted with high fever. I was confined to my room for five days. My hostel warden was kind enough to ask me whether I felt home-sick and needed to visit home with an escort. I politely refused his offer. I added, 'My health will get worse sir, if I go there and also, I do not want my education to get disturbed. Please help me get an injection from the college doctor. That is enough. I will be alright. I feel that the fever is due to some other thing. I keep getting bad dreams now a days.."

My feelings came true when I heard the sad news from my friend Srinivasan on the following Monday morning. Fate had played a horrible game of coveting my grandfather from me.

CHAPTER-17

THE MISPLACED HAIR DRESS

Yes! After getting somewhat better, I entered my class on Monday. My friend Srinivasan delivered the horrible news.

"Dei! Your grandfather Gargar passed away on Friday. I was expecting you in Athazhanallur. Were you not informed about the news?"

That's all! Already I was recovering from the fever slowly and this news was enough to make me feel dazed. I fell down unconscious. Everyone around me panicked and sprinkled water on my face. I sat up and sobbed.

"Srinivasa!Why did not my father inform me about my grandfather's sudden death.? For him, my marks are more important than my

feelings. He would have thought that I might not perform well in the exams if I had been informed about this. Anyway, thanks a lot to you for letting me know. I am not going to ask my father or fight with him. I know his harse nature. Let him tell me whenever he wants. Do not talk to him about this if you see him please..”

I was heavily disturbed by this news. My mind was in a turmoil. I was unable to come to terms or my sense that my beloved grandfather was no more. What a great man he was! He was responsible for my wellbeing and helped me join the hostel. Distance never bothered him. Though his health was deteriorating, he never missed an opportunity to communicate with me. He was such a benevolent soul. I was struggling at the loss of such a great man. I felt that I was unlucky to lose him so early in my life.

Finally, the news broke out from my father on the following Thursday. It was as if he never wanted to reveal it to me. There were only a few crisp lines delivering the sad news. As I guessed correctly, he had mentioned that fearing I would cry, worry and not concentrate on my education, he did not inform me.

What a brutality it is! Even a fearful lion will have some iota of affection and love. I cursed my fate and tried to recover from the shock. My seething anger did not allow me to reply to my father. Finally, I somehow finished my final exams after the second semester. I did pretty well.

In between, there were lots of competitions going on in the college. A month before the final exams, these items were conducted. I secured the first prize in the junior group. My father never came to see me get my Certificate. The memories of my grandfather bubbled up on the surface. He would have praised, hugged and blessed me for such feats. I tried to gather my strength slowly.

My college friends organized a Skit or a small drama-- named 'Kannagi' a concept of Tamil Big story Silappathigaram. In that, I played the role of 'Kannagi'. Something hilarious happened during the performance. My science teacher bought a Wig with long tresses suitable for the part I played. My friend Parasu applied appropriate make-up and tied my hair-dress using a short rope. He asked me to be extremely careful while performing the emotional scenes. I was looking so pretty that few of my friends tried to kiss me in the make-up room. It was a ruthless teenage time.

Though everything was going well initially, during the climax scene, I became very emotional and bent my head down to throw the 'Anklet' as per the story. Along with the anklet, my wig came out of its place and fell on the floor. A huge roar of laughter from the crowd changed the emotional scene into a hilarious one. I felt very embarrassed after that. Though the drama went off well due to the timely intervention of the director, I felt humiliated and my tears continued till the end of show.

After that incident, my friends teased me a lot saying "You are indeed a unique Kannagi!"

CHAPTER-18

DURING THE TENURE IN PANDYAN BANK

Finally, my hostel life came to an end. I returned back to my house in Veeravanallur. After seeing my mother, I started crying. My father wasn't there.

“Why Amma? Why did Appa do this to me? My lovable grandfather was in his death-bed and I was not even aware of what was happening. What sin did I commit? Why couldn’t I see my dear grandfather, atleast once last time?” Tears gushed out like a flowing river. The words didn’t have any effect on my mother.

“Babu! I tried telling him to inform you, but you know your father very well. What could I do?”

I did not ask anything when I met my father and did not speak at all. He was also maintaining the same state of silence. Maybe it was the ‘Guilty conscious’ feeling which was making him behave like that. After my homecoming, an advertisement from Pandian Bank appeared in the local newspaper. After seeing that, he said, “Babu! This is a good chance. For joining as a clerk in the bank, a pass in S.S.L.C is enough. You should apply for the job now.”

He immediately brought a sheet of white paper and a pen. But I protested in a lighter manner.

“Appa! After finishing P.U, I want to study B.A and become a professor. Please allow me to continue in the same college. If you want, I will go by train from here every day.” As soon as I uttered this, he grew angry.

“Dei! What do you think in your mind? Till your grandfather was alive, everything was possible. Now, I don’t have a single penny with me. I am struggling to feed everyone. Without understanding the condition of the household, you are talking nonsense. Now, look! Send an application to Pandian Bank and attend the interview. I will accompany you. Otherwise, get out of the house.”

The threatening words immediately brought tears in my eyes. I wanted to yell louder that my good marks and prizes were useless but I couldn’t do anything at that time except filling out the form and sending it by post. Within fifteen days, I was called for an interview, probably due to my exceptional marks and qualification.

I was interviewed by the MD of the bank, Sri. S.N.K. Sundaram. His large physique and hoarse voice frightened me. I produced all the certificates before him, proudly explaining my accomplishments in English. Looking at me, he started laughing loudly.

"I will give a clerical job for you. You can join next week. All your certificates and marks have no value for me. For the initial three months, you will work as an apprentice in our bank without getting paid. After your Branch manager certifies you to be hard working and efficient, you will get a salary of forty rupees for the next nine months. After that, another certificate from your Manager and a bond of three thousand rupees from your father will fetch you a salary of Ninety-six rupees from then on. Don't be boastful about your marks. Just forget them!"

"If your father and you agree for this salary and arrangement, sign a letter and give it to me now. You can join the Kallidaikurichi Branch which is near your village. Start working there. Then we will see. O.k? Next!" Telling this, he pressed the bell on his table.

Hearing the tough conditions, I felt low and shared the information with my father. "Appa! Should I have to work here for less salary? Also, in the first three months, there is no income. Shall we try elsewhere?"

But he was tougher than the person sitting inside the office. "Dei! Who will give such a job for people like us? Accept it without any doubt. One year will just fly. Then, you will get a salary of ninety rupees. Do you think you will be offered a collector job? Kallidaikurichi is nearby. For the first three months, I will give you forty rupees. You can look for a room with some people to share. Control your expenses. I know a person called Krishna Iyer who runs a home mess.. You can have your food there. I will ask Raja Iyer, our relative to help in searching an ideal place for you to stay".

My father kept on ranting without trying to understand what was going on in my mind. He pulled a paper, wrote what was required and signed it. He asked me to sign it and then give it to the loud voiced M.D. I did not feel a single speck of happiness in getting a job. My chest felt

heavy and I did not utter a single word till we reached our home. After that interview he took me to nearby hotel.

The delicious tiffin of idli and dosai didn't even kindle my taste buds. My father did not talk to me after that but his face was shining brightly. The thought that I will be earning more after a year could be the reason. In the year 1957, fifty rupees extra was a huge amount. I tried to accept my fate. I always wanted to become a professor. But, my luck was only to become a petty clerk. At least I got my freedom to move away from the Lion's den. That was my only comfort.

My luck got me a place to stay, through the help of Raja Iyer. It was a small home and I had to share the place with a student named Prabhu and a bachelor named Padmanabhan, who was also working in Pandian Bank. The following week brought me the joining order. I got accustomed to staying with my room -mates and tried to be cheerful. My father sent me an amount of forty rupees every month through someone. I had good food in the canteen/mess as advised by my father. Krishna Iyer was kind to me. He had a beautiful daughter and he wished slowly to make me as his Son-in-law, after two years. He used to casually pass off the information while talking but I was very careful not to show any interest in that topic.

Fate always liked to play with me inspite of my extra cautious nature. The change came in the form of my room -mate Padmanabha Iyer.

CHAPTER-19

FRUSTRATION FOLLOWED BY BLESSINGS

It was not even two months since I came to that house. My fate acted faster in driving me away from the comforts of that small beautiful house. Padmanabhan was a bachelor. Suddenly, I came to know that he was a homosexual person. It was around 11 in the night one night and I was sleeping soundly. His awful behaviour and intentions lay exposed that night. I was extremely shocked and pulled his hand away which was

holding me tight and I shouted at him loudly.

“Sir! Your behaviour is not at all good . I gave respect to you as you are a knowledgeable senior accountant in the Bank, but I did not expect that you will behave like this badly..I am going to shift from here tomorrow.. Now, please leave me alone”.

Immediately, he retaliated and apologized for his actions. He promised to be careful in future and begged me to stay in the house. The next morning, I casually shared my experience with my other room-mate Prabhu. He admitted that he also experienced the same behavior from him , a month before and was in total agreement of the decision of moving out. Fortunately, we got a place to stay, on the same day itself. It was closer to the bank and the rent was five rupees. A keralite named Kunjan Nair,working in the Electricity Board was residing there. He was a communist and welcomed us happily with open hands.

“Comrades! I was struggling to pay twenty rupees every month and was thinking about asking you to share the place. I have to send money from my salary to my family also. Today, only my Lord Guruvayurappan has made my wish come true.”

We were very happy to settle the amount with Iyer and shifted to the new place on the same day.. Prabhu was relieved to escape from the torture of Padmanabha Iyer and he thanked Lord Murugan for the relief.

The new room in upstairs was spacious and airy, with two windows,though the toilet and bathroom were very small . They both were located downstairs. But, we didn’t mind it.

The very next day, our room-mate Kunjan Nair shouted at us for speaking and laughing loudly. “Comrades! The way you both speak loudly is risky. The owner of this house stays downstairs and she is very nosy and tough. She will spread ill words about you. I had experienced this once with my own friend who misunderstood me.” Since then, we both became careful.

But, one day around 8 a.m, I was casually joking to Prabhu about my Bank Manager. I was making fun of his dark colour and smoking habit.I commented "His sister is a well-known Pundit and a upanyasak, and her face glows radiating her knowledge. But,this man's face, you see, looks dark like a coal." The effect of these words took shape after three in the evening.. Prabhu laughed loudly as if it was a big joke though Nair warned us not to speak or laugh making fun of my bank manager. He mentioned that 'Even the walls have ears'

The same day, in the office, after lunch, I was called in by the Manager who greeted me. "Oh! Please come, my great Pundit! I am darker than my sister and I have smoking habit. What can be done? Can I change my colour and my habit just because you have such opinion on me?"

This abrupt question paralyzed me for a moment. Oh my God! The alert by Nair which I had ignored had come true. My ridiculing unwanted comments would have fallen in his ears. I immediately fell at his feet and asked for forgiveness.

"Sorry Sir! Unknowingly, I behaved like a small child. I didn't know that you were there. Please forgive me!" I was sweating profusely by the time I finished my sentence. The way I apologized must have stirred him. He lifted me up and spoke.

"A.R.S ! [I was called so in the bank] Actually, I came to your house to share a happy information. You are living just two houses away from mine. So, I decided to tell you in person and while I was climbing the stairs, I overheard your conversation. It was indeed a very nasty comment on me . So, I sadly returned. From now on, don't gossip about others behind their back. Take this as a warning. You are yet to grow in life. You are smart, you work hard and that is why, I gave a report to the Managing director to confirm your job soon. I was coming with the Order to offer you a salary of forty rupees from this month,. I wanted to give it personally but as soon as I heard your bad conversation, my enthusiasm drained. Be careful in the future. Here is your order." His good choice of words in a kind manner brought tears.

“Sir! With a large heart, please forgive me. I will never repeat this in my life and I will never talk ill of others hereafter”. My pitiable condition made him say that he forgave me. He asked me to return to my desk and resume my work.

The above experience and the haunting thoughts that my hard-work and my efforts towards my Academics had fetched me nothing other than this meager job, pushed me into illness. But, my friends took care of me by providing me with suitable medicines and other requirements. The owner of the house was also kind enough to offer porridge and bread for a few days. I recovered slowly within three days and was thankful for the act of kindness from the people around. From the bottom of my heart, I thanked the owner and her little daughter and conveyed to them that I owed them greatly for their concern about me..

After complete recovery, I went to the Kallidaikurichi Perumal temple with Prabhu. I sat there for a long time chanting Vishnu Sahasranamam. I felt a surge of happiness flowing within me. Six days after that evening, I sat down to do GayathriJapam. Suddenly, I had a vision of my Babaji in my mind.

“Babu! Think of all the unpleasant experiences as a reward of your self-created karma. Everything is for your own good. Your problems will fade away as time passes. Bring my image in your mind if you ever get disturbed. The solutions for your problems will blossom soon.”

His words soothened me and gave tremendous comfort. “From now on, my life is in your hands, Guruji!” These words poured out from my heart.I bowed down to Him and made a promise that I would never get disheartened by the untoward happenings anymore and that I would surrender to Him wholeheartedly.

A couple of months rolled over. Soon, I learnt to manage my expenses well and was able to send five rupees to my father, every month. I was also regular in sending letters and found out later that my father was very happy and proud to receive the letters and money from me. He had boasted about it to each one of his friends which I came to know on my

visit back home during Diwali.

Happiness gushed inside me after hearing my father praising me for the first time.He appreciated me for my efforts to save money and asked me to keep the forty rupees for myself from next month.. He also advised me to have enough food to take care of my body which appeared very lean. He quoted that 'A good frame is essential for a better picture.' That is a popular saying in Tamil to take good care of our health.

I was astonished to hear such caring words from my father and pinched myself. He understood and smiled at me. "Babu, look! It's me who is saying this. Your health is more important for us. In two months, your job will become permanent and you will start earning more." He blessed me.

After Diwali celebrations, I returned happily to my work. One evening, in the temple, I met my friend, my Bank accountant, Rajagopal. It was a secret meeting. He spoke in a low tone. "A.R.S..! I want to say something. Please keep this information with yourself. Our Bank Manager is not a good person as you think. He hasn't completely forgiven you. He has tarnished your name and has suggested a transfer for you to another place. Be prepared. You may get a transfer within ten days. Accept it without resisting. Our manager is like a dangerous snake. Since no letters can pass without my knowledge to the Head-Office, I happened to know all these. I truly believe that you will shine where ever you will go. So, be brave!" With this, he held my fingers in a caring manner.

Hearing all these words from him shook my mind from the roots and I was equally surprised to understand that such horrific people exist in this world. As warned by Rajagopal, on a Saturday, the venomous Snake put up an unhappy face and produced a letter before me.

"A.R.S! I feel sad to give this transfer order to you. Our M.D has changed your position to Ettayapuram. It is a proper good village. God should give you strength to endure.ok?. Best of luck! Be strong!'

Though his face showed a kind expression, I could see a venomous grin spreading inside.

CHAPTER-20

I LOST THE JOB

I packed my things, bid farewell to my friends and started my travel back home the next day. Mess Iyer, Krishnan, with a kind voice but with a sad face spoke to me.

"Babu Sir! I thought you will be here permanently after getting promotion as an officer and a raise in salary.. I wished that you will marry my daughter. I spoke about this to your father too. Now, everything has turned into a dream for me."

I was unable to reply but I secretly met his daughter's eyes and said 'Goodbye' to her. She sadly replied with a 'Yes' and asked me to be in touch with them.

After seeing my mother, I didn't know what happened within me. I started crying and my mother tried to console me. "Don't worry, Babu! Think that everything is for your own good. If you go to different places, you will get more experience. Is it not?". My father also felt the same.

"Babu! If you had stayed there, that manager would have definitely damaged your career. At least the transfer is only to Ettayapuram. Your favourite poet SubramanyaBharathi's birth place. It is not far off from here. So, try to cheer up."

After five days, with a heavy heart, I left to Ettayapuram. Though I feared what could happen there, I consoled myself with the thoughts that I can visit Bharathi's home, his Manimandapam and other places of significance. But, my hopes crumbled soon. The people in the bank were kind to me but the home they suggested to have my regular meals

left me with a bad taste. The food was salty, the ghee and the butter-milk served were of very poor quality and had bad odour. I couldn't control myself and asked the owner of the mess mami(or aunty) after three days.

"Mami! I don't want ghee but can't you offer butter-milk and vegetables in a better taste? My mother cooks very well and I am used to having ever good food." Wearing a smile on my face, I tried to convey what I had in my mind in the best possible way. But, it back-fired.

"Dei! The twenty rupees which you give will fetch only this. If you are so desperate for good food, ask your mother to come and stay with you. This place faces water scarcity. We don't have any other source of milk except from Arumugakonar. This is a small village. Try to adjust accordingly. Don't try to act smart with me."

The words came sharply out of her mouth. So, I couldn't change anything and managed somehow for a month. I informed my father about the quality of the food available and conveyed that my health could get affected very soon.. Since my friends were Non-vegetarians, they were managing to eat at other places. I told my father that I needed extra money to have good tiffin elsewhere atleast in the evening.

My father replied that I would not have to send him any money and that I could use the amount to have good food in Pillai Mess which he knows somehow, and improve my health. I was surprised by his kind reply; the way he had written it with concern, which I had never experienced even once till then, from him. A poetic thought surfaced in my mind. 'The other end of a thorny stem has a soft petalled rose'.Immediately I brought the image of my Babaji and prayed to Him deeply to set my life right and to make it go on in a smoother way.

After two days, in the evening, I went out to have a look of Bharathiyar's house and Mani Mandapam. I was very happy to see the hand written copies of Bharathi's beautiful attractive poems. The letters were written neatly,with adequate spaces between them. Certain verses drew my attention. I tried to memorise them with enthusiasm. Yes, by

understanding the deep significance of the lines which project the meaning 'Think Good, Practice Virtue, Have strong Will and pure Wisdom', I learnt some important values that were essential to survive in Ettayapuram.

It was a relief to find out that the hotel run by Pillai provided good quality-food and when I ran out of money, my friends were kind enough to provide funds and encourage me to be bold and happy.

"A.R.S! If you look on the brighter side, there are some items sold at a cheaper price. You can have bananas everyday." The kindness and support showed by them was for some other intention, which I realized only later!.

Yes! There was a UNION (for workers)- which was run secretly to fight against the Bank Management. The Bank was exploiting workers, making them work for extended hours and for less payment. The Application form to join the union was fifty paisa only . They convinced me to join though I put up my resistance initially. The reason I gave was that I was a temporary Clerk and that I was prone to get dismissed first if the Management found out about my joining.. But, they completely disagreed, saying that around 2000 temporary clerks were in the Union. They showed the list. If everyone joined hands in fighting, only then we could get a salary hike, Diwali bonus and lesser working hours. They also said that the information would be kept secret. I believed what they said!

Believing their cunning words, I paid the fee and signed the form, hence agreeing to join the Union. Using my wits, I also penned forty slogans in Tamil against the Bank Management.

Within two months, I got a very nice reward(!) for my act. The secret meetings in the night,the practice of slogans and the discussion of ideas against the Management came to light through a snitch amongst ourselves. Somehow, the Ettayapuram Manager came to know about this. Soon, the news reached the Madurai M.D. He made a sudden visit to the Bank in the night and called everyone including me, who had

assembled there. He shouted angrily which made five temporary workers, including me, to fall at his feet and beg for pardon. We came to know later that he wasn't appeased. Since I was writing slogans against the Management, I was the first one to get a Dismissal order. When I took the order from the Manager, I got a feeling that he was the second venomous snake I encountered.

I feared that my destiny was getting worse. I couldn't think of a way to disclose the news to my family, particularly, my father. But, in the corner of my heart, a relief blossomed at the thought of getting pampered by my mother's care and good food.

When I came back home, I explained everything amidst crying. My father felt sad but tried to console me. "Don't worry Babu! I heard from your Kallidaikurichi friend Ramasubbu about the dismissals. He explained everything and told me not to worry because all the temporary clerks who were sent back home will be taken back soon due to present work load and back-log. He also said that the Management would hesitate to employ new people due to the high expenditure involved. He had heard this through his close friend in the Head-office. So, do not lose heart. First of all, why did you join the Union? It is not proper to raise slogans against the Bank which pays you!Where did your brain travel when your mischievous friends cajoled you??" He scolded me.

After that, I just accepted what happened and enjoyed the affection that my mother showed. I mocked and enacted to her and my brothers, the way I used to eat butter-milk and ghee during lunch by holding my nose. This made my mother and my brothers laugh. They were also happy to be with me,listening to new stories from me every night , created by my extra-ordinary imagination and peppered with some reality.

My father did not pressurize me to apply anywhere, taking the words of Ramasubbu, that they will revoke me to the same position in the Bank. This gave me comfort for a while. But, my providence led me to a different bad route ie. the train tracks.

The sole reason for that incident was VembuMami(aunty) and her

daughter Sita., who were distantly related to us somehow!. I will tell it elaborately in the coming chapter, as to why I took the extreme decision of going to such an extent of laying my head in railway track and why my Guru Babaji didn't guide or help me during such a difficult moment.

CHAPTER-21

COMMAND FROM A MYSTERIOUS VOICE!

Oh! Did I say that my Guru Babaji didn't save me from my extreme decision? Sorry! I am extremely wrong. Though great Yogis and Saints wait initially for a while for our karma to act, when they see that our faith and devotion is steadfast and true, they rescue us from the clutches of karma against the law of nature. I understood this only later.

After coming back home without any job in hand, I spent two weeks helping my mother in the house-hold duties. I also took care of my brothers by helping them study in the night. My father didn't bother about my job,and allowed me to be myself. After two weeks, on a Monday, my father's cousin sister came home and put up a request.

"Ramji! My daughter has been called for an interview at the collector office for the post of Hindi teacher. It is in Tirunelveli and I am afraid to send her alone. If you send Babu with her, I will be happy and relaxed. Seetha will also feel better."

"So what Vembu! Babu is idle at home. He can go with Seetha." After agreeing to her request, my father told the information to me. It was decided that the travel and food expenses will be borne by Seetha. Though she was three months older than me, we were childhood friends and used to make fun of each other.

So, the journey to Tirunelveli became a fun filled trip with laughter and jokes. Soon, we reached the Collector's office only to find that the place

was heavily crowded. There were 158 candidates who had applied for the posts of Hindi and Sanskrit teachers. Though the interview was carried out by many officers, her turn didn't come till two in the afternoon. Finally, a clerk came out to announce the lunch break and asked the remaining candidates to have food and assemble later. Seetha came out and took me for lunch.

Though the ordeal was very boring, to sit for hours together, I could not complain as it was my father's wish to help her. After lunch, I came back to the same spot thinking her turn would come sooner and we can leave. I started counting the leaves of the tree above my head due to boredom. Time was flying but there was no sign of Seetha till five. I couldn't sit any longer and decided to go around for a walk along the compound wall of the office. This decision of mine to scale the length and breadth of the compound wall became a huge mistake.

Around 5.30p.m, I came back to the same place. There was no sign of her. I walked around searching for her but in vain. Finally, I gathered some courage and went inside the office to ask a clerk. I explained to him that I came along with a candidate named Seetha and I couldn't find her. The clerk looked at me and mockingly said.

"Oh! Is it you who came with her? Her turn got over at five and she searched for you everywhere. She was at the verge of breaking down. She told me to pass on the message that she is going back home, if you come asking about her. She asked you to come back home. Such a good escort you are!! Hahha!" He taunted me and resumed his work.

Feeling anxious, it hit me hard that the act of walking around had gone completely wrong. I was apprehensive of facing my father more than anything. Before leaving, my mother had given me some money to use in case of any emergency.

Thoughts raced in my mind.'Does Seetha have even a bit of brain? Can't she wait for a while? What was she thinking? Couldn't she understand that I was sitting there the whole time pushed into boredom?' I kept talking to myself. Feeling weary, I rushed to the bus-stand in search of

her. It was around 6.30 then and I was in and out of all the buses leaving to viravanallur. I stood there confused and cursed my fate of getting into such a problem due to VembuMami and her bad daughter. This was all because of my father. Every Monday was a bad day for me.

Finally, I boarded a bus and went straight to Seetha's house. She had guessed that I felt bored as I had complained about waiting while we were having food. She thought that I decided to go back home. Her mother pointed out that it was my fault for not being at the same spot where I had been earlier. They both had gone to my house and had explained everything in case my father worried about me. VembuMami warned me to be cautious in future and not to overthrow my responsibility.

I came to the conclusion that the two ladies were full of arrogance and selfish by nature. Till their work is done, these kind of people bow down to any extent and then blame others to escape from the mishaps.

Muttering angrily under my breath, I entered the house. Usually, around that time , my father would be at the neighbour's front patio, chatting away about all the important news around the world. But, that day, he was sitting inside the house waiting to pounce on me.

"Dei! Do you think you are a big king? Can't you wait for her at one place? Why did you want to roam around? You have earned a bad name for me. Poor girl Seetha! She came home tired and crying. You are not fit for anything. Not even a small help can you do properly!." He kept shouting and beat me on my cheeks and back. "Vembu accused me very much and I am ashamed. This was all your fault. Get a job soon and get out of this house."

Before I was beaten more, my mother came rushing and held his hands and protected me.

"Babu is grown up and it is not right to beat him up like this. If something happens to him, what will we do? It was only Seetha's mistake. Cant she wait till Babu was back.? A very mischievous

girl.Leave him. Don’t beat him further!I will take care of him.” My mother held me and took me inside.

“It is because of your extreme pampering, he is getting spoiled.” He muttered under his breath and went out to his friend’s place. My mother pacified my hunger by feeding me curd rice with onion sambhar. I realized at that moment ‘A kind mother never shuns her responsibility’. Amidst eating, I spoke to her with tears choking, “Amma! I am fit for nothing. If I don’t get the job back, I will die.” My mother trembled and shut my mouth with her tender fingers and said,”Please do not speak like that, Babu! It is like throwing embers on me. You are my sweet boy..Even though your salary was less, you sent some money home. Who will do that! Those two ladies don’t have good hearts. Don’t go to their house hereafter. They have tarnished your name by telling lies.” She wiped my eyes affectionately.

I knew she tried to support me and understand my heart. It was scary to even think about my life without her. Due to tiredness, I went to bed at 9 pm., grabbed a book and tried to read to divert my mind. Soon I fell asleep. Fearing the wrath of my father, my brothers did not come near me to converse or console.

As usual, I woke up at 5. My mother went out to clean the front yard and put kolam [Rangoli] using rice flour. When she came back inside, a sudden determination and a wave of negative thoughts gripped me tight. I wore a shirt, took a towel and a tooth brush and under the pretence of taking a bath, I came out of the house. My stride was very fast. Two old men saw me and spoke to themselves about how strange they felt to see me very early. I went near the pond and brushed my teeth. Then I had a glass of hot coffee from the Pillai hotel nearby. Then I started walking towards Veeravanallur railway station which was two miles away. I bought a ticket to Pettai station. After ten minutes, a train came. It was looking very empty and I hopped into it and sat on a seat.

With a wave of self-pity engulfing me, I covered my face and started crying. My mind started analyzing all the events that had happened since I joined the Pandyan Bank. I questioned myself, 'Why is it that I am facing failures particularly on Mondays? I am sincere in chanting Maha Vishnu Japam and Gayathri Mantras in the morning and evening. Am I not focusing on the Japams? Of all this, I have great respect for my Guru Babaji who appears in my dreams and Japams. Then, why is it that I am facing lots of troubles, that too, in the form of Seetha?"

With negative thoughts hounding me, I decided to end my life. I got down at Pettai Station and sat on a cement bench on the right side. My mind was constantly weighing whether my decision was right or wrong. But, my weak mind won atlast.

I thought to myself,'It is enough. I cannot win anything in my life, cannot bear any more beatings and abuses of my father. I cannot spend my life in constant fear.'

I got up from the bench slowly and walked towards the west.There was no one around. I saw a track curving round a heavy growth of bushes. Vague thoughts hovered as I kept walking. 'If I lay my head there, no one can see me lying on the tracks from the station. Even the driver will fail to see me.'

I laid myself across the tracks. Five minutes went on in silence. I looked at the sky. It was looking bright hinting to me that I will soon be free from all these miseries. I heard a faint whistle from a far-away train. 'O.k! In two or three minutes, my life is going to end.' An immense joy engulfed me. I could hear the train approaching. I shut my eyes tightly. The sound of the whistle gave an eerie feeling and at the same moment, a strange voice was heard.

"Dei Babu! Look at me closely! I am your Guru speaking now. An order has come from Pandyan Bank asking you to rejoin. A bright future is awaiting you. Why are you lying here? Get up immediately. Run backhome."

I saw the glowing face of my Guru in the centre of my brows. He was smiling and a fast movement of a hand appeared as if He was helping me to get up. I couldn't lie down anymore and I jumped to my right towards the bushes. The train ran speedily on the tracks missing me by just a hair breadth. I was shaken completely from my head to toe.

Having experienced a great escape, my heart pounded heavily in my chest. "What was I thinking? Why did I act like a coward? How did I forget my Guru ?"

I cursed myself and started walking towards Pettai station and waited for the return train to arrive. I sat on a bench. I kept thinking about all that happened a while before.

I felt terribly hungry. Lo! It was as if my Guru sent a person specially for me, a small boy walked towards me with parcels of food. "Anna [Brother]! You look hungry. I have packets of vadai, curd rice and bondas. I will give them all for a rupee." He forced the packets into my

hand. I laughed wondering the amount of faith he had in me that I will be able to pay him back. I got up, gave the money and washed my hands from the water pump nearby. Chanting Gayathri Mantra, I opened the food packets eagerly.

CHAPTER-22

MANTRA BESTOWED BY GURU BABAJI

It would have been strange for the station master to see a young boy sitting in deep thought and with a sad face. He was going on rounds. He stood near me and enquired about me, with concern.

"My Son! Who are you and where are you from? Are you studying in Pettai Hindu College or have you run away from your home?" I was startled to face such a question. I didn't want to disclose the truth. So, I said that I was waiting for Veeravanallur train.I showed him the ticket but he was not satisfied with my reply.

"O.k! Whatever you say,, I know you are hiding something from me.. Think of your parents and get back home. The train will come in five minutes."I felt relieved when he finally moved away.

Yes., the train arrived in exactly five minutes. I thought that I was lucky to get food. Otherwise, I would have fainted by the time I reached my village.

After getting down at Viravanallur station, I walked slowly for two miles to reach my house. The clock had ticked 10 a.m by then. As I surmised, my mother came running towards me, crying bitterly. "Babu! Where did you go? We were searching for you since 5 A.m!"

My father stood before me but didn't speak. He simply stared at me for a

while and turned towards my mother.

“Sornam! Leave him! The king would have been angry and had purposefully roamed around to see you cry.Whatever it is! Did not I say that he has to come back here for food. Is it not?Take him inside and pamper him nicely.” He said sarcastically and left the house to while away his time with his friends in Rayar Bank.

My brothers had left for school by then. I told everything to my mother except my stupid thought of lying down on the railway line due to the fear of breaking her heart. No one knew about this. I said that I was very embarrassed when my father beat me. So, I decided to go to Madras and do some job to survive. But, I slept in Pettai Station and a Saint appeared in my dream. He ordered me to go back home as I was about to receive a letter from the Pandyan Bank asking me to re-join sooner.

My innocent mother believed what I said. “It will be true, Babu! Your Horoscope is very good and you will shine in your life, as the Athazhanallur and Kallidaikuruchi astrologers have predicted. Also, you are chanting Vishnu sahasranamam regularly. God will never let you down. ”

It was indeed a miracle! At around twelve in the noon, a postal cover arrived bearing the name of my father. There was an order from Pandyan Bank asking me to join in Virudhunagar Branch as soon as possible. The salary mentioned was 85 rupees. My mother was very happy that day. She expressed her delight in such a way that she kissed me on my forehead a few times as she could not lift me and jump around. She said that I was very lucky. My father was also very glad and the salary raise was un-expected for him.. He said;-

“Sorry da Babu! Don’t ever lose your heart. Like your mother said, you are very fortunate and the fortune will continue. Be brave! Gain a good name in the bank. The coming Monday is auspicious and we will go to Tirunelveli to buy some good ready-made shirts and pants for you. I will come personally to drop you at the Virudhunagar Branch. Ok?“

I was beaming with joy and I was equally amazed to think that how my Guru Babaji saved me from the clutches of death by provoking me to come back home. I kept thinking about this and was stupefied. I made a resolution that in future, I should never be afraid of anything and should act as per my Guru's words.

The next day, my father and I reached Tirunelveli and bought some good clothes at Sundaram textiles shop. At an auspicious time on Monday, we entered the Virudhunagar branch of Pandyan bank. Manager Dhanapal spoke to us in a kind manner. He seemed to be a nice person. He called the peon and asked him to take us to Gandhimathi Aachi's house. He also ordered him to purchase food coupons for a month for me..

He then looked at me. "A.R.S! Go with him. It is noon already. You can take good rest today and start the work from tomorrow which is an Amavasya (No moon) good day. Since you have come today, I will write your name in the attendance register, so that you will get the salary starting from today. For the past two days, I was expecting you. The work load is heavy here and there is a shortage of two clerks. There will be coming another person named Lakshmanan joining tomorrow. You both can stay upstairs in a room in next street for a rent of ten rupees. Your food will be from Aachi Mess and the monthly coupon costs only Rs. 25/-. They will serve tiffin in the morning and meals in the afternoon and night. The food will be very tasty. There is another hotel nearby, run by an Iyer. But the food is not worth the price."He said kindly.

My father and I were very happy to get everything at a cheaper rate. We both went upstairs with the peon named Nachimuthu and kept our bags in the room. We cleaned ourselves and went down to see Aachi. Despite her old age, she seemed very strong. We spoke to her, bought the coupons and then, we sat for lunch. Like the manager said, the food served was delicious. It had two vegetable curries, fluffy rice and home-made curd. I was also happy to see Aachi's beautiful grand daughter who helped her in serving food.

My father was satisfied with the arrangements and gave fifty rupees for

my expenses. He wanted to go back home immediately and asked me to send at least thirty rupees every month. I agreed to do so and went to the bus stand to drop him.

The room on the first floor was very airy. I was sleeping soundly till the peon came and woke me up at 5 p.m. I started the work, the next day. As said by the Manager, the work load was very heavy and it dragged on till 8 p.m.

Lakshmanan Iyer joined the bank, that day. He was around 22 years of age and was well built. He seemed to be a jovial person, smart and agile in completing the work. He, somehow, convinced the manager and asked for his permission to take bath in the bank bathroom as the water was soft there. The reason he gave was that he came from the place Theni, where the water quality was better. Also, he needed some privacy to do exercises followed by chanting.

"Ok, Lakshmanan! I will allow you as a special case.But be careful. This is my office. There is not much crowd here and you should not allow any body inside. Safety is important for me." He warned Lakshmanan and the watchman. The other clerks and accountants teased him for asking such a favour.

Everyday, I used to wake up early, brush my teeth and go to a nearby well to take bath. It was one mile away from my room. The water was drawn using a big basket. Each person was given three baskets of water at a cost of ten paise. The used water would flow across the farm comprising of twenty coconut trees, four mango trees and some flowering plants.

My life in Virudhunagar was great and enjoyable. After taking a bath, by 7.30a.m, I would return to my room. Chanting Vishnu Sahasranamam and Gayathri Japam along with a few exercises became my routine. Lakshmanan Iyer used to go for a walk early in the morning and by 7a.m, he would rush to the bank's bathroom to take bath. We had a good understanding and there were no unnecessary talks. When he was in the room, he used to spend his time trying to recite some

slokas. Around 8.30a.m, we would go down to have tiffin in Aachi mess. By 9.20a.m, we would be in the bank. For around eight months, life sailed smoothly and happily with all my good friends around.

But, around the month of June, people living there started facing a huge scarcity of water. The wells situated around started to dry up except the one where I took my daily bath.. If I went a bit late, a huge crowd would have gathered already, forcing me to wait for more than half an hour for my turn to come. Poor people waited for a long time in queue with their pots jostling around. This delay made me worry everyday. I sat in my room, one day, for hours together thinking about the problem that everyone were facing.

When Lakshmanan saw me sitting like this unaware of the time passing, he tried to cheer me up. "Do not worry, A.R.S! You said once that a Saint appears in your dream and during Japam. You pray to Him deeply and ask for a solution. Since it is for the betterment of the whole society, it is nothing wrong to ask. If He appears, speak boldly. I will also pray my Goddess Annapoorni to show us a way. There will definitely be a solution to this problem.ok?".

I took this as a cue from the Divine and started praying every day. I silently pleaded my guruji Babaji inside to help me.

What a surprise! On the sixth day, my Guru Babaji came in my vision.

" My blessings are always there for you, my dear son! You are praying for the welfare of the people, and it is always the right thing to do. Hundred years before, there was a similar situation of drought here . A benevolent person named Palvanna Nadar found a solution for this. From your place where you are staying now, two miles away on the western side of the market, there is a huge water-hole called Valavan Pond. The area covers approximately three acres. Nadar led the work of removing the shrubs and thorny bushes around the area, cleaned the silt and muck around. He consecrated a small idol for the Deity Valavan and did elaborate rituals to please Him. The idol was secured in the eastern side of the Pond. He placed ten huge water pipes in all the directions in

such a way that the rain water collected from various places fell directly into the huge pond throgh the water pipes.. Whenever it rained, water from all sides came rushing and filled the pond. The ground water level also started rising. The wells around the area were always filled with ample water. But, over the years, problems of all sorts cropped among the people due to caste difference, monetary issues and lack of unity. People forgot to take care of the Valavan Pond. It has been reduced into a garbage dump and all the pipes are blocked now. People are paying the price for their negligence and caste feelings..”

“Now, to rectify this problem, convey what I said to your Manager. All the accounts of the Panchayat members are in your Pandyan Bank. Influence them by explaining about the pond and ask them to make a visit. The idol of Valavan Deity is sitting amidst the over-growth of the bushes and a name board bearing ‘Valavan kulam’ is lying near it. It has been there since forty years. Everything has turned useless. The younger generation is unaware of this. But, the good old people may still remember the times when this pond was functional and productive. Go and talk to those people with your manager. My blessings are always there for your first social and divine service”.

Uttering this, He disappeared. But, the glow of the vision stayed in my heart for a longer time giving me bountiful happiness.

In the next chapter, I will explain in detail about how my Guru Babaji’s prophecy came true in rectifying the problem of water scarcity. The only bad luck was that I was unable to stay in Virudhunagar for long. In the month of August, within nine months of my stay, the bank transferred me to Srivilliputhur branch.

CHAPTER-23

My SECRET ACT

When my Bank Manager Mr.Dhanapal was looking a bit relaxed

in the evening, I explained in detail as to what I came to know from my Guru Babaji during the meditation.

"My Guru said that the Panchayat members and councilors have their accounts in our bank. If you discuss what I said now with them, there might be a remedy for the water scarcity prevailing here. You will also be applauded, Sir! Please try your best."

He was a God-fearing person. When I pleaded him to do the needful, he accepted to give a try without any hesitation. He called the concerned people like Panchayat Councillars, some old people(customers) to have a discussion on this issue. They were surprised when they came to know the subject of the discussion. They were also trying for a long time to find a solution to the existing problem but did not know how to go about it. After hearing everything from the Manager, they called me. They praised me and promised to plunge into action as soon as possible. We both felt excited to hear this.

The place which was told by my Guruji was like a dump-yard in an un-identifiable condition with lots of thorny bushes and unwanted greenery all over. It took nearly twenty days to clean the place thoroughly and to remove the silt., and rubbish etc.

At last, as predicted by Babaji, a small idol was found in a corner with a name board-VALAVAN- lying beside. The idol was removed and cleaned. A small platform was raised. With the accompaniment of drums and ritualistic chantings, the shining statue was placed on the platform. The Deity was decorated with garlands and flowers and several lamps were lit. With the sacrifice of a goat, the Valavan Deity was consecrated.

Following this ritual, a large number of people participated happily in renovating the pond and donations were received. The broken pipes which were long and which stretched to streets,were replaced. Others were cleaned thoroughly by removing blockages and debris. After the removal of silt and clay in and around the pond, the place now looked beautiful. In the surrounding temples, rituals were performed for invoking rain. Within two days of homam, chanting of special manthras

etc, there were heavy rains for three days. The water which flowed along the Main road and inside the Brahmin and nadar streets came to this new tank though the pipes laid. The tank was full and people were very happy. Thus the water problem was solved there by the grace of Babaji.

After our work in the bank was over in the evening, we participated in the festivities. The Panchayat members felicitated my Manager and me for the new idea and initiating the solution for the problem that the people in the village faced for a long time. With beaming happiness, I conveyed to Lakshman that this was a golden time in my life. But the happiness did not last long.

I received a transfer order on the same day to Srivilliputhur. Two people had already resigned in that branch and the bank had ordered to relieve me immediately. I broke down. I cursed my fate which always showed a ray of hope and happiness and then ripping it away forcefully from me.

My Manager felt sad at the turn of incident. "A.R.S! Goddess Devi, in your case, gives a beautiful toy. She allows you to play with it for a while before pulling it off your hands".

He knew all the hardships I underwent after joining Pandyan Bank. He assured me that he will plead Kamala Madam, the Assistant Director of the bank , to retain me in that branch. He called her as per his promise but a blunt reply was all that he received.

"Sir! What is so special about A.R.S? Is he your son? Don't get emotionally attached to a clerk. We will send another clerk by next month. Relieve him today without fail."

So, I packed my luggage and went to thank Aachi and her beautiful Grand Daughter for their hospitality. I started my journey to the new place on the same day, in a bus.

The Manager of the Srivilliputhur branch, Mr. Subramanian, was awaiting my arrival. He asked the peon Aandiappan to lead me to my

room which was situated near the famous Aandal Temple. The daily food was arranged in 'Appan Iyengar Mess'. I joined the duty the very next day. Though the food in the Mess was quite tasty to my palate, the way it was served could never match Aachi's hospitality, I thought.

Also, the incident which happened in Virudhunagar had spread over but I wasn't a bit proud about it. I shared with my friends by saying that it was the sheer Blessings of my Guru and nothing else to add.

The room where I stayed was occupied by two other people. For our daily morning routine, we had to go to the pond named 'Madavar Valagam', located near the Siva temple, two miles away from our room. And It was very difficult to go there when I fell ill at times.

. The workload was also very heavy and at certain times, I felt that my independence was lost. One of my room-mates, Madhavan Nair, would take the room keys with him, and go out purposefully. I did not have any option other than waitingfor him to come.. Maybe I looked like a kid to him. He also extracted work from me often.

Unable to tolerate it anymore, I found another place ie. a good house to stay, taking the help of the temple priest. Though the rent of Rs.8 was high for me, the people sharing the place were good to me. We had lots of fun together; singing movie songs and chatting away.

The Bank Manager's wife, Sivagami Mami treated me like her own brother. She offered to provide food for me on special occasions and festival days stating that I was single. The Manager was kind enough to readily agree upon the idea. Since his house was inside the office, the aroma of cooked food wafted throughout. The Manager used to make quick visits to the kitchen, in the morning times following the scent with his nose. The clerks felt awkward and jealous after he came back with a satisfied grin on his face.

They too made fun of me, describing me as Mami's pet and lucky to have good food there. In the same year, I got an increment of ten rupees.

After eight months, a regular customer named Muthu iyer secretly brought a cutting of Hindu paper and produced it before me., when I was taking rest in my room.

"A.R.S ! How long are you going to work hard for a small salary? I see you as my younger brother. You are very intelligent. This is an advertisement for the position of clerk from the Reserve Bank of India,Madras ..You fill in all details in a white sheet and give it to me. I will keep it in my puja room and then post it. Let this be a secret and let us see what happens." He whispered into my ears softly.

Though I was initially afraid, I asked my Guru Babaji's opinion on it during my meditation at night. I had to sit for almost an hour for him to respond to my dilemma. "Believe me! I am only prompting you to apply at RBI through Muthu iyer Everything will go fine. Success will follow your effort. Do not worry!" Babaji opined.

After hearing HIS words, I felt confident and happy. The next three months went by without any information on my application. I got doubtful about the way I presented my application in hand-written format. I feared that it may have gone in the trash. But, to my surprise, I received a reply on a Thursday, the day when I pray to my Guru sincerely and deeply for an hour.

Looking at my credentials, the RBI letter said that .my application was accepted and I was requested to attend a written test on the 15th of the following month. The venue was in Madras and all the details of the exam were clearly mentioned in the letter. I took it and ran to show it to Muthu Iyer who took efforts in applying for me. By evening, he brought a few relevant books to help me prepare for the exams. I worked hard for a month going through them. When my room-mates enquired about it, I dismissed them by telling that I was preparing for the bank exam.

I did not know what to do for the expenses. When I asked Muthu Iyer, he told me not to worry about that. "My Uncle lives in Triplicane. I will inform him about your arrival and ask his consent. He will help you. Don't worry." He motivated me to do well in the exam. He showed his

uncle's photo also to me. He gave me some money also.

Under the pretence of visiting my family, I took a bus to Madras. The place overwhelmed me but the presence of Muthu Iyer's uncle at the bus stand was of great help. He took me to his house and treated me well. He even accompanied me to the exam venue at RBI the next day. Since I was new to the city, he was worried about me being duped by some cheats. He waited for me till I finished the exam. The exam was quite difficult but I managed to do it well.

After we came back home, we had a good meal. We were chatting about my job and slowly, sleep started over-powering me. Looking at my condition, the kind couple asked me to sleep on the cot in the guest room and asked me to have a good night's rest and leave for the next day. Though I felt embarrassed, I couldn't refuse. I fell asleep immediately once my head hit the pillows.

In the evening, I meditated and felt the Blessings of Babaji in their puja room.. The dinner was well served. They questioned eagerly about my meditation practice and interest in my spiritual quest. I answered them politely.

In the morning, before leaving, Mami gave a plate full of fruits and some money. I was moved by their kindness and love. Spontaneously, I uttered that they will be blessed with a child soon with my Guru Mahan's blessings. Later, I came to know through Muthu iyer that my words indeed came true. I was happy.

The very next day after my arrival from Madras, I joined my Bank. I did not utter a single word about the exam to anyone and kept it a secret. In the evening, Muthu Iyer came to my room and enquired about my ordeal. I informed him that I had written the test well and if I get selected, I will be put in the waiting list till a vacancy for the post arises. It might take six or seven months.

Muthu Iyer suggested that I could inform my father about this once I receive the order and then seek his permission to go to Madras. "It is a

reputed central bank Of India and it will not hurt your father to see you work there. Till such time, keep this within yourself and stay happy."

My mind kept on thinking about what Muthu Iyer said. I feared how my father would react once he becomes aware of the fact that I had taken the decision to appear for the exam without even consulting him. Also, what will happen if Pandyan Bank officers get to know? I may lose the present job and might not get into RBI. My father will jump up and down and yell at me. Various thoughts confused and scared me, though a tiny speck of happiness grew and spread within me. It was my first daring act against my father. I sat like a statue for ten minutes in the verandah.

I knew that it would take at least six months for everything to materialize. The officer in the exam hall had said so. Comforted with my thoughts, I looked at my watch. Oh! It was already seven and it was time for having my dinner. I rushed inside my room for my daily routine of prayers.

CHAPTER-24

My POETIC WORDS--WAY TO FAME

My life in Srivilliputhur came to an abrupt end in nine months. The stay was very short and there was nothing much for me to feel nostalgic about. The only happy memory was the effort I took in writing the Reserve bank exam and receiving a letter after two months. The letter mentioned that I was put in the waiting list and should be prepared to join the bank once I receive the offer.

I started visiting Sri Andal Temple of Srivilliputhur on Tuesdays and Fridays with the prayers of receiving my joining order as soon as

possible. An elderly Vaishnavit(Iyengar) person caught note of my regular visits to the temple. He wanted to know more details about me. I politely replied to him in short. A good looking girl was standing behind him with a bright face and interest in her eyes. She happily intervened in our talk often.

With a genuine request in her voice, she conveyed secretly to me that she had completed her tenth class with high marks and wanted to pursue a degree in nearby college, but her father is standing in her way.. She asked me to talk to her father for her college plans. Though she was good looking and was trying to meet me often, I was extra cautious not to cross my limits. Else, my attention towards my regular practice of meditation would get affected. Also, I feared my father. Luckily, my struggle to balance myself came to an end very soon.

My Guiding force, Guru Babaji appeared in my dream. He advised me not to get entangled in such trivial issues and that I was soon to be transferred to another place in a week.

As opined by my Guru, I got transferred to the Sivakasi branch. With the positive thought that 'Everything happens for a good reason', I took it sportively. But, I revealed my intentions to two of my friends who were there at that time with me, without giving it even a second thought.

"Dei! I am not going to stay in Sivakasi for long. I am going to settle in Madras soon. This Pandyan Bank throws me in different places every six months. I am going to join Reserve bank for a higher salary." The words were soaked in pride. They simply laughed at my ego.

My hasty speech had an effect soon. Within a week, I saw my father suddenly standing in front of my room with an angry face. Somehow, he had found the address where I was staying with my friends in Pandyan Bank Unity Home at sivakasi.

"Dei! How much audacity you have! One of your room friends wrote a letter informing me about your secret decision to join Reserve bank. I had to come rushing to see you." Immediately, I knew it was

Kesav, my room-mate. He was pestering me for my home address and now, I knew the reason behind it. I cursed him silently.

"Why do you have to leave the job at Pandyan Bank? They already confirmed your post and have given an increment also. Aren't you grateful for that? You didn't even ask for my opinion before applying for RBI. Now, you say that your name is in the waiting list. If the present bank comes to know of this, you will be dismissed even before RBI confirms for a placement. Then what will you do?"

He thrusted question upon questions on me. The only relief was that he took me away from my friends to interrogate me, rather than doing it publicly. I looked at my father's face with courage and spoke,

"Appa! (father)There is nothing that you don't know. RBI is a famous Central Government bank. My close friend Muthu Iyer said that the basic starting salary is Rs.465 per month in Madras. His brother's son, Sowmyan is working there. I know him too. Srivilliputhur is his native. Muthu Iyer was the one who pushed me to attend the exam. He also suggested that Chennai was the right place for me to grow and I can gain a higher position within ten years from now. He also felt that Pandyan bank has been unnecessarily tossing me around and the salary was very much less for my good credentials. Within six months of time, RBI will call me for an Interview, Appa! I can also send more money to you from there."

My father instantly became happy after I highlighted the salary part , but cautioned me. "From now on, you have to be very careful, Babu! Don't go around talking carelessly like you spoke to Kesav. People are already jealous of you. There are a lot of evil eyes upon you. O.k? "

My father promised to send five hundred rupees for the expenses once I reached Chennai. After this incident, I felt very much relieved, as if a big storm had been evaded in the form of a small drift.

Just as expected, within two months, I was called to Chennai for joining in RBI. I attended an interview for formality. On the first of July,1963, I joined the new office. My father had sent me money as promised for the initial expenses of my stay. He had asked me to stay at his cousin brother Krishnan's house till I got a good accommodation.

So, at a pre-planned date, I reached his (my periyappa's)house in Chennai. I saw his children [three daughters and two sons] for the first time in my life. When we were young, my father never used to take us anywhere fearing the expenses.

Now they were all kind to me and chatted with me nicely. My uncle (Periyappa)-was working in high position in Secretariat. He was the Personal Secretary of the Chief-Minister. He was well known in his office and had great respect.

I joined RBI and learned the work slowly and steadily. The work was different from what I experienced in Pandyan Bank but it gave me happiness and satisfaction. For a month, I was commuting in a bus to my workplace from my Uncle's home. After I received my first salary, I conveyed to my uncle that I wanted to move to Murugesa Naicker Mansion in Triplicane. It was a reputed place to stay among the bachelors. I did this purposefully, so as not to give my uncle the financial burden of providing for me in a family of seven. The house was also small and I didn't want to invade their privacy. I felt odd at certain times to take liberty with my elder sisters there.

I also understood that a problem was going to ensue in the family. Through my practice of meditation, I came to know that my elder cousin Mr. Pichai had fallen in love with his own friend's sister.. When I confronted him about this in my own way, he blurted out everything. He was then studying BVSC(Veterinary Scince Doctor)

"Babu! How did you find this out? You are brilliant! She is my friend's sister but they are from an economically backward family. I do not know how I am going to convey this to my father. I am very scared." I asked him whether the girl's family would accept him as their son-in-law. He couldn't give a solid reply for that. I gave him a suggestion.

"Look my brother! You are in your second year of study. You still have two more years and one year of practice as a veterinary Doctor. If you fall prey to love at this stage, you might lose your concentration and interest in learning and scoring good marks.ok?. Explain this to the girl's family and stay away from her for three more years. In the meantime, I will talk with uncle for you and try to make it a success. Till then, I will pray for you."

Though I was younger to him, he took my words seriously. We went to his friend's house and I explained his family situation and his own father's temperament. The girl's parents understood the reality and accepted my words.

"See, Babu! We are not rich. So, as you say, if our son-in-law excels in his career, who will say no to that? "

The girl was very beautiful and smart. Everyone co-operated well and my cousin brother excelled in his education and became a Veterinary doctor.

My Uncle Shri Krishna Iyer somehow came to know soon of his love for that girl. In the 1960s, falling in love was a taboo. He did not approve his son's decision. So he went to Madurai to his friend's home and fixed up an alliance for his son. Though my brother put up a lot of resistance, nothing could pacify his father and the marriage with that Madurai girl

couldn’t be avoided.

Later, when I asked my Guru about this during meditation, he opined that the marriage would not last long and that Pichai would move to the North with his lover. Before the marriage, when I spoke to my aunt, she felt that she was helpless to support her son on this issue. Finally in two years,, Pichai, my brother divorced his wife though he had a child with her and married his lover and went to North India .

My uncle’s whole family plunged into grief and I stopped visiting them for a few years, as they felt that I am also involved in the conspiracy..

Another reason was that my two younger brothers came from Veeravanallur to stay with me in my room at Triplicane. They couldn’t withstand my father’s temperament and strict behaviour. The one good thing that happened was that they both got good jobs in Madras.Since I couldn’t manage monthly expenses for all of us in an economical way, we discussed and rented a small house with a kitchen and a room in west Mambalam in Madras.. We managed cooking with a few vessels and a stove. My brother Venkat was good in cooking. So, my brothers helped me a lot in saving some money and sending it to my father as promised.

Two years went by smoothly. We felt happy and independent and enjoyed the freedom it gave. But, life doesn’t remain like that. A good proposal of my marriage came for me. My father was working in Tirunelveli Arasan Company at that time. It was the month of March in 1967. I received a postcard from my father. ‘Babu! I saw a girl for you in Palayamkottai, and the girl is from a good family. Both horoscopes are also matched well.She is looking beautiful and of calm nature. You have to come here for the formality of visiting them. If you agree, then the marriage can be fixed in June.’

My mind raced with the happy thoughts of not having to spend my nights alone in the terrace looking at the sky and counting stars. By evening, I started to Palayamkottai and gave a shock to my father the very next morning. My father laughed heartily,and made fun of my swift arrival to his room-mate Mr. Shankar.

“Look at my son, Shankar! I just wrote a few lines asking him to come and see the girl. Unable to control himself, he has come in the morning itself.” But, Shankar gave a friendly reply. He supported me . “He is twenty-six already! How long can he stay alone? His good stars have somehow shown him the way.”

After taking enough rest in my father’s room, a message was sent to girl’s father that we would visit their home in the evening. The sudden information had shocked them as it was planned in a short span of time. The girl’s father was a very good person. He was working as a Senior Stenographer in India Cements Company and was also practicing Homeopathy at home.

The most awaited evening came. I requested the girl to sing and gave my consent for the marriage boldly in front of everyone. My father was very happy to find that I had fallen in love at first sight with the girl he chose. An auspicious date was fixed. My marriage with my beloved Kamakshi was celebrated on the fourth of June, 1967 in pomp and grandeur at Tirunelveli, which held great fame for the Gandhimathi Amman temple. Along with my mother and siblings, I rented a bigger house in Brindavan street, West Mambalam and started living happily with my wife.

My In-laws felt ,..after four years , that the birth of a child was getting delayed. So they performed some rituals, followed by a visit to Thiruchendhur Lord Murugan temple. After special prayers, my wife conceived and gave birth to a beautiful girl child in 1971.

With my Guru Babaji’s blessings, the time when my daughter touched this world, I was invited for the first poetic meet in Mylapore to stage a poem on the topic ‘Beauty’. This first opportunity paved the way for me to obtain fame through poems. The events will unfold to you happily in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER-25

PHASE OF SPIRITUAL DISCONNECT

Yes! It was indeed a surprise for me. On the day when my daughter was born, I got my first opportunity to stage my Tamil poem in the poetic meet. I always had immense respect for KalaimamaNi Kothamangalam Subbu, who was a renowned personality and a poet. He was the Chief Guest for the Kaviarangam who presided on the stage. It was like a dream come true for me. I jotted this experience of mine in my personal diary to cherish those memories throughout my life.

A week before, I had met a person named V.S.Mani in my office by chance. He was the Secretary of Bharathi Youth Association. While talking to him, he sensed my involvement in Tamil literature and respect,with love towards the famous poet Subramanya Bharathi. He thrusted a receipt book in my hands asking me to collect donations from RBI friends for the association. Also, he made arrangements to stage my talent that week.

With my confidence boosted by him and my longing dream to take my poems to the next level, along with the faith in my Guru, I wrote sixty lines on the topic 'Beauty'. I practiced reciting the poem in my house several times.

April 14th, 1971 was a blessed day for me. It showered me with extreme happiness. I had sprinkled humour throughout the lines of my poem. The crowd was enjoying and the chief guest Mr. Koththamangalam Subbu, kept applauding me every now and then. Finally, he praised me and blessed me with the name 'VEDHAM' which stuck to me as my 'Pen Name.'

As soon as I got down from the podium, a group of young people surrounded me to appreciate my performance. One person who looked very intellectual asked me to concentrate on my grammar and focus on the old form of writing poems rather than the new style. He also said firmly that if I stick to changing my style of writing, then my reputation might grow. Once he moved away, I enquired about him. The person was found to be none other than 'Tamizhazhagan', a famous poet in Tamilnadu well known for his Literary works.

As soon as I reached home around 10 at night, I encountered another sweet surprise. It was a telegram from my father-in-law saying that I was blessed with a girl child. The very next day, I applied for three days leave and took a bus to Palayamkottai. My cute little daughter was waving her tiny hands, lying beside my beautiful wife. The twinkle in her eyes created a ripple in me giving rise to a beautiful poem about her which I still hold dear and cherish by looking at my diary where it is

penned.

I named my sweet little angel as 'Sudha'. I shared the happy news with one of my best poetic friends, Kavimamani Ilandhai Ramaswamy who immediately wrote a few poetic lines punched with grammar at its peak. I was indeed surprised at his intellectual ability to coin such challenging words together in no time.

When I enquired about it, he suggested a few books on grammar(VENBA) which he had used personally to achieve such mastery. I could still hear his motivating words. I bought the books and with great effort, practised creating more poems. I got a lot of exposure showcasing my talent in Bharathi Youth Association. Duly I received honorary titles in my poetic front and participated in debates and in various meetings. I also managed to collect funds for the association and soon, in 1973, I was honoured with the post of 'Associate Secretary' for 'Bharathi Pattimandra Academy'. This gave me more exposure and confidence to face a huge crowd and meet great people.

Within six years, I became known as 'Kavignar Vedham' among the Literary circle. My office colleagues also started calling me as 'Vedham Sir' instead of A.R.S. In between all of this, I got accustomed to a group of Non-Believers who called themselves as 'Atheists'. I started doubting the existence of God looking at the problems ensued in the society which was inflicted with dark politics and injustice.

My mind got heavily disturbed by looking at the outcome of such discriminations around me which forced me to write around forty poems. The contents described the outcome of a biased society and the evils in it. I voiced my opinions on the stages of Bharathi Mandram. The lines were mainly focused against the attitude of God who neither condemned the evils nor came to the rescue of setting the world in the right path.

The Chief of Bharathi Kalai kazhagam(a famous Tamil Sabha) Sri.Suraj, and poets Mr.Na.Si.Varadharajan and Tamizhazhagan advised me not to tread the path against the divine and spoil my future

and reputation in the poetic world. They feared that my attitude towards atheism, would pull me down. This attitude of mine created a confusion in the household too during the period of 1972-1974.

During the period of1972 and1974, I was blessed with another girl [Raji] and a boy {Swaminathan] respectively. My financial situation became tighter and there were a few disputes in our family. Later, I realized that one of the reasons was my sudden abandoning of spiritual practices and losing track of my Guru Babaji. The other reason was the effect of the evil Planchette (a Plank in which ghosts can be asked to speak)practice by my next brother Venkitachalam.. This created a lot of negative effects on the whole family and started ripping us apart from Divine worship. I later realized that a restless spirit of one of our fore-fathers thought of creating chaos in the family and hence, the confusion and tragedy.

As a person from the religious practices of Hinduism, I would like to warn the readers now to be wary of not following our traditional worships and chanting of mantras. If not, we will be misguided by the negative elements around us and ill-effects might follow. This is very true from my personal experiences. I will try to explain it shortly.

My brother, Venkat brought home a Planchette from one of his friends, who also had taught him how to use it to get information and secrets from departed souls. He used our last brother Krishnan,(aged 14) and one of our sisters (aged 10)as a medium to extract information. Some information proved true but others, not so. At first, I was unaware of all these happenings at my home and so, I couldn't stop or control him. But, over a period, chaos started prevailing in the house. Venkat slowly stopped all his spiritual practices in the evening and was pulled away from divine activities. Finally, when I came to know about all these, it was too late. I tried persuading him to throw the board away and begged him to go in the right path, highlighting my concerns about the acts of evil forces. He dismissed everything justifying that he was invoking only good souls. He strongly believed that our neighbours and friends were benefitted from it. He laughed at my fear and ridiculed me as a coward.

Due to this, I could neither concentrate on my meditation nor obtain divine guidance from my Guru. My mind was always clutched in

sadness.

My wife's consoling and lovable words couldn't render happiness. My atheist thoughts kept surfacing in my mind. If there is a God or any superior being, HE should have protected us by now. Confusion prevailed in the house-hold and I started yearning for a miracle to happen. My father was working at Tirunelveli at that time. My mother was an innocent lady who was very submissive. She led her life fearing the moods of her husband and sons.

One day, during the session, a soul spoke to Venkat. "Your life is over. You have done a lot of help to people. Your karma has got nullified. You need not be born again and again. End your life somehow, burn the Planchette and join us. Lord Narayanan is calling you to Devalokam(Divine world)."

He couldn't understand that the calling was from an evil-spirit. Believing its words, he set himself ablaze at midnight and ended his life. The one last good thing he did was to write a letter in detail about this adding that his family members were not responsible for his decision. So, we all escaped the Police arrest.

As if this was not enough, my other brother was mentally disturbed and was roaming around for three months. Somehow, due to his good stars, he got cured soon. One day, he spoke to me. "Brother! I was making fun of the instructions of the spirits. Maybe, because of that I had to undergo such a trauma!" These were undesirable events which happened in a family which was once pious and God-fearing.

Soon, I got a new friend in my office. His name was Vasudevan. He was totally dedicated to spirituality and renounced marriage. And so were his two sisters. He played a great part in bringing me out of my confusion and atheist mentality. He provided me with a lot of books on yogis and saints. We talked a lot about all of this during our lunch hours. Slowly my spiritual faith was restored.

In 1975, one day, Guru Babaji appeared in my dream and spoke. "My Son! Why did you try to tread in a different path? Did it give happiness? Did it give any eternal solution to the problems you faced? It is not so. Then, why did you allow yourself in getting confused? Did you see the effect of negative forces? Due to your -some bad karma, I couldn't give you protection or help you. Did you really delve deep into the Hindu philosophy or Bharathi's songs? If so, you would have found out whether they embraced atheism or not. I was just watching you to see how far you could go in the other direction. That's why I did not appear within you for a long time.. Now that, you are back in your destined path, I am before you. We both are immersed in the deep river of spirituality and worshipping the rare pearls of divine. Do not ever forget that!"

Saying this, he placed his hands on my head to bless me and vanished. After this incident, my mind became strong in following the spiritual path. After a few days, I met saint Sri. Vedhathri Maharishi at his Tiruvanmiyur Ashram and received his divine touch and further spiritual upliftment.

Slowly, I became known through my poems. During the end of the year 1975, I participated in a Literary Competition. For that, I wrote a story in a poetic form named 'Gayathriyin Kaadhal' [Love of Gayathri]. With my Guru's Blessings, it was composed in a short period of time. The competition was organized by Mr. Vikraman,Editor of the well-known Tamil Literary magazine 'Amudhasurabhi' and by Poet Sri. Krishnasrinivas who was running an English monthly magazine named 'Poet'. Around six hundred participants were there but my work was

selected as one of the best creations and fetched me the first prize, and a sum of one thousand rupees which had high value in 1975.

CHAPTER-26

WHO IS MY GURU?

The Prize money of one thousand rupees was given to me through the hands of the famous World Poet Dr.Krishnasrinivas in the presence of the great Novelist Na.Pa, Justice Maharajan..and.'Kalaimamani' Vikraman. My friends from Bharathi Kalaikazhagam [Association] and Cine Poet Vairamuthu were among the crowd who cheered me up and praised me. Vairamuthu was getting offers in the Cine field at that time and was in the growing phase. He hugged me and spoke happily.

"I am very happy for you, Vedham Sir! I am getting offers in Cinema field for my lyrics, like you predicted the other day! I have faith

that I will also become famous like you." I still remember his voice sounding and ringing in my ears .

After this incident, I was called for many programmes from various organisations . I was also called as a Chief-Guest in Nataka Sabhas and Kaviarangams(Poets meet) In the wake of enhancing myself, I started researching and gathering more information on the everlasting poets, Bharathi and kambar. Through this I got acquainted to good and like-minded people likeDr. Avvai Natarajan, Dr.Silamboli Chellappan and many more. I was given more platforms to showcase my talents.

Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India , Madras allotted for me an apartment in the Reserve Bank Staff Quarters at Besantnagar. My flat was on the third floor. I shifted my residence happily over there with my wife and three little children. With the Blessings of Guru, my siblings got very good education and later got married one by one.

My Wife Kamakshi took over the house-hold work entirely well and co-operated very well in taking care of the family and also in my sisters' marriages. In case of shortage of funds, she readily gave her jewels as a loan and helped in fulfilling my duties well... My parents were very moved by her kind gestures and were all praises for her. I showed my appreciation and thankfulness by writing a poem on her.

In April 1976, my senior RBI official , Mr. Balu took me along for the inspection of old currency notes in various banks. He appreciated my work and wrote a good report about me to the higher authorities. I was asked to appear for the Officer exam. By the end[kv1] of 1976, I got promoted to Officer Rank. I had the privilege to work in the new sections of RBI and implemented new ideas and techniques to bring in a change to the monotonous and repetitive ways of working/statements preparing etc in some sections.. My clerks and other Officials appreciated my efforts and work. They thanked me for bringing in a change in the system.

Some officers and clerks, who were my close friends went a way

ahead and learnt Tamil Grammar from me to create and improve their skills in coining Tamil poems. I helped in getting some of them published.

Soon, a Tamil Literary Association was created at my residence- quarters.. A group of fifteen enthusiastic members joined and agreed to conduct a meeting every month. Many well-known Poets and Scholars participated. There were no barriers or limitations on the Techniques and Grammar of poems which were presented. Even 'Haiku' poems received a huge applause from RBI residents.. Hand-written copies of the Poems were circulated and appreciated by the fellow-residents.

Amidst all of these, during the end of the year 1976, my thirst to know more about my Guru started building in me. When I shared my thoughts with my Guru during one of my meditation session, He asked me to get the answer through a sincere search which will kindle my interest further. I started my search by giving a fair idea of how my Guru looked like. The Editor of the monthly magazine 'Amudhasurabhi' Sri. Vikraman was a great Scholar with immense interest in History and Spirituality.

When I put the question to him as to who is my guru,(giving the features of Guruji who appear in my dreams!)_ he said. "Vedham! I don't know. Though I had asked many writers for the articles on Siddha-Purushas', I am not particularly attracted to this path of Meditation. This is because of lack in my concentration in those in Divine matters- and also due to my tough nature of my magazine work.

But, I can guide you to some person named K.R.Vasudevan, who is the Editor of Dinamani Kadhir".. Saying this, he immediately pulled out a paper and wrote a letter to him personally. K.R.V was working as an Editor in 'Dinamanikadhir'. At that time, I had written five short stories in Amudhasurabhi in the name of Vedham. Vikraman asked me to take a few short stories with me while going out to meet him to publish.

During my first visit, I took two of my writings alongwith and went to see him at his house in Mylapore. He promised to publish them and started talking politics and other worldly affairs. I couldn't broach the topic of my search since three visitors were already waiting for him. So, I promised myself to visit him again with my friend. The chances to know about my Guru glowed in the near future. This was because my friend Mr.Jeyaradhan had spoken a lot about K.R.V's devotion and faith on Shirdi SaiBaba and his articles in 'Tribune' on 'Siddhars' after interviewing some writers in person.

By now,a printer named Muthu was printing a mini journal named ‘Anuviradham’ which was a Jain literary monthly issue. I had been contributing articles to this magazine and also helped in proof-reading as a service. Muthu came forward to publish my first book comprising of thirty poems and the prize winning ‘Gayathriyin Kaadhal’.

As promised by him, the book came out in a month and since it was my first maiden attempt, I organized a 'Book Release Function' on a smaller scale at myRBI residence quarters.Meeting was arranged in the Main Hall which was built for conducting official meetings and drama etc. with the permission of the Bank authorities. A Tamil Great Scholar and writer Naa.Parthasarathy, fondly called as Na.Pa was the Chief-guest and Mr.Vikraman(my Amudhasurabhi Editor friend) agreed to speak about my poetry book. Everything went extremely well.

Around six in that evening, at the entrance gate of my Living quarters, I was stopped by a long-bearded old Muslim man. He spoke to me with a teasing tone. “What is going on, Iyer? It seems that the book has been released today! Hmm..The answer for your search about your Guru is for tomorrow.. Am I right? Very well done!”

I was really stunned by his words. “Yes, Sir! What you have said right now is perfectly true. I am unable to recognize you but your words seem like a jig-saw puzzle. Please come home to have a cup of coffee. Then, we can talk”.

He laughed loudly. ”Why, why ! Are you trying to capture me in your hold? Do you think it is really possible?” Uttering this, he made a swift walk and when he reached the milk-booth, he disappeared instantly like a whiff of smoke. I was shocked by his sudden disappearance and strongly believed him to be a Siddhar. I felt a sudden sense of guilt and longing. I could have asked him about my Guru.

But, the next morning revealed the answer to his puzzled talk. Being a Sunday, my friend Jeyaradhan came to my house to take me to Mr.Vasudevan. “Vedham! Let us go and meet him today and we will surely ask about your Guru. I have brought a new Novel of mine and I want to give it to him. In the middle of his talking, I will try to remind about your Guru. Otherwise, he will keep on talking without a pause.”

I kept thinking about what the old man said. His words were coming true and I was speechless. With enthusiasm spreading in my nerves, I left for Mylapore with my friend. We reached the house of Mr.Vasudevan, who took the book from my friend and kept it before the picture of Sai.

"Mmm..Jeyaradhan! You are always good at telling stories. Your Novel must be well-written!" Then he started talking about Saibaba and his own divine experiences. The topic switched to the then Tiruvannamalai Yogi Ramsuratkumar. He detailed about the interactions he had with this great Yogi for specific Edition of Dinamani issue [Pongal] and the spiritual secrets he received from him. The subject of the talk was so interesting that we temporarily forgot our hunger and it was past noon.

Finally, at around two, his wife came with three bowls of vegetable soup and asked us to have it as we were sitting for long and might feel hungry. Realising the hunger pangs gripping us tightly, we finished two servings of soup cups in no time. But editor Vasudevan refused to have more than a cup of soup saying that the talk with great writers(pointing out to me and Jeyarathan) had already filled him enough. We felt humbled and thanked his wife for the delicious soup. Right at that interval, my friend intervened.

"Sir! My friend Vedham has come to ask you about the Saint who appears in his dreams always and during meditation. Please help him find his Guru". Vasudevan immediately chided me for hesitating to ask by myself. Then I spoke. "Sir! After my thread ceremony around twelve years of age, whenever I chanted Gayathri with sincerity, my Guru would appear in my dreams, visions and later during my meditation practice. His fore-head appears as Bald, has a tiny moustache and a protruding belly. He is always in Padmasana posture sir".

Before I could finish my sentence, he happily responded. "Oh! I know. He is the Saint Lahari Mahasaya Swami.. He was the direct disciple of Mahavatar Babaji. He is not alive but a statue of Him is in

Kasi. Around 120 years ago, He had initiated many people into the path of KriyaYoga in Kasi and Calcutta. It was a new method of Yoga which combined both Severe meditation and a few exercises and I had heard that He chooses selective people to pass on the knowledge. You are a very blessed person, Vedham. Give me your hand." He pulled my hand and kissed it.

That was enough to make me feel dizzy and a surge of lightning spread through my body. My inner mind spoke. "Oh! Mr.Vasudevan should also be from the yogic tradition. Otherwise it is impossible to talk in length about so many spiritual things and about Enlightened ones. He should also be truly blessed."

I fell at his feet at once and with a shaking voice, I spoke. "Thanks a lot, Sir! Can you tell me any book that could help me in knowing more about my Guru?"

Replying in a soft tone, he added. "There is a book named 'Autobiography of a Yogi'. The author of the book is Swami Paramahamsa Yogananda. I had enjoyed reading the book several times but I don't have the book with me right now. I have lent it to one of my friends. Sorry, Vedham!"

At once a flash of yearning shone in my eyes. Jeyaradhan held my shaking fingers tightly and promised to give a copy of the book he had with him all the time. "Come home tomorrow, Vedham! You can see and know more about your Guru. Don't worry!"

CHAPTER-27

THE VISION OF THE GREAT GURUS

The words uttered by my friend made me shiver. It was sheerly because of happiness and surprise. I immediately made up my mind to visit his house and get hold of the Spiritual book. His house was right on the way to my home. We bade our good-bye to Sri.Vasudevan, Editor of Dinamani kadhir.. It was 4'o clock by then. On the way, I shared my wish to Jeyarathan to accompany him to his home. He understood my hunger and eagerness to know more about my Guru and my respect towards Him. He agreed to take me. As soon as I stepped into his house, a strange feeling enveloped my mind.

His wife guessed that we might not have had a proper lunch. A platter of Puris and Potato curry was spread on the table. Hot steaming coffee was served after. The food tasted heavenly and I couldn't thank her enough for the delicious cooking. We finished her good tiffin.

Then, before I could utter anything, Jeyaradhan went inside and brought the book ‘Autobiography of a Yogi’. The book was covered neatly and I received it with both the hands and bowed before it. I opened a page randomly and lo! A beautiful picture of my Guruji LAHARI BABAJI popped up before me. His eyes were half-open and He was sitting in a lotus posture in a state of trance.

The picture created an emotional turbulence in me. I shouted aloud without even thinking about the environment where I was in. “My Friend! See here! My Guruji has blessed me in person!”

Jeyaradhan’s wife, Lakshmi, was startled to hear my sudden outburst and came running from the kitchen. But my friend handled the situation well by telling her that it was an emotional cry from a disciple who had been searching for knowledge about his Guru for the past twenty years.

Within ten minutes, I went through the six pages consisting of my Guru’s photo in a whiff! I went into a trance and my Guru appeared in my Aagnya chakra. (Centre of my Fore-Head)

“Dear! Has your quest to know about me quenched? You had undergone many difficulties until now. But, to confirm that I am your Guru, ask your friend whether he has read beyond thirty-eight pages. He lost concentration and faith in the story and had kept the book aside for two months. He had not gone after 38th page.Ask him whether it is true or not. With his answer, you will understand that I am your Guru.” With this, the vision of Him faded.

With a good feeling inside, I posed the question which my Guru had revealed. Jeyaradhan was startled to hear from me.

"Yes, My friend! I couldn't focus my mind after reading thirty-eight pages. I was utterly bewildered about how a fourteen year old lad(he mentioned about Sree ParamaHansa Yoganandha, who is the author of that wonderful DIVINE book !)-could get away from his home in search of his Guru in the snow-clad Himalayas. The disbelief made me keep the book back and stopped me from reading further. Who told you all these?" My friend enquired with a hinge of doubt and fear shone in his eyes.

Laughingly, I pointed out at my Guru's photo. "He also said that if you agreed to what I said just now, I must get convinced that He is my Guru. The answer from you now confirms that HE is indeed my Guru. This makes me feel very happy!"

The joyful response from me made my friend shed tears of joy like me. He immediately held my hands. "Like Mr.Vasudevan said, you really are a truly blessed man. Please pray for me and for my whole family. Now, I feel like prostrating before you. Your Guru is such a great Saint."

He stood up to fall at my feet but I stopped him from doing so. "What are you doing, Jeyaradhan? We both are travelling in the same boat. You are a great writer and an Astrologer. You are older than me. Never do such a thing."

Uttering this, I stood up immediately and told him that it was time to leave as my wife would be worried, since I left my house very early in the morning. I assured him that I would return the book after reading it and buying my own copy from Higginbothams, at mount Road , Madras.

"Dear friend! My search is complete with your great help and by doing so, you have taken a permanent position in my heart. My sincere Pranams to you! If my Guru happens to tell me more about you, I will definitely let you know. I will leave now." I thanked both of them for their hospitality and left the house.

As a token of seeing or dharsan of my Guru and my conveying Guru's words about him, Jeyaradhan promised to read the rest of the book to get Sri Lahari Mahan's blessings and came along with me till the road to help me catch an auto. He also paid for the trip. I couldn't refuse his kindness and was astounded by his gesture.

Within two days, I completed the book. Luckily, the office was closed for two days and I could grasp and retain every single word of the book. The book created a spiritual surge of waves within me and I was pushed to a state of Samadhi. On the third day after I finished reading, I felt continuous dizziness. My body was more than warm and I felt more heat in my brain. I could not do my routine work normally. So, I took leave for a week from my Office. My whole family was afraid to see my condition and called for Jeyaradhan's help. He came rushing to see me but understood my state.

"Your husband has understood his Guru fully and the realization has made him move to an ecstatic state". He comforted my wife but didn't stop with that.

He called Isaikavi. Ramanan's father, Sri. Anantha Ramaseshan, who was an Assistant Editor in the 'Hindu'. He expressed my condition and asked whether he could help me. Sri. Ramaseshan came to see me and promised to take me to his Mantra Guru Sri. Rama Iyengar Swamigal on the following Sunday.

'Singaperumal koil' is a place which is situated near Tambaram, next to Maraimalai Nagar. Sri.Rama Iyengar Swamigal was living there. The three Banana trees in the front of the house shook their leaves heavily as a sort of greeting when we entered it. There was a small porch in the front. The house barely had people at the time we arrived. We asked the Lady of the house for a plate and placed the fruits and betel leaves and nuts. We then prostrated before him. Mantra Upasana Swamigal was sitting on a long plank of wood. His Pancha-kacha dhothi was as white as his long flowing beard. His skin shone bright and a vision of Mahan Shirdi Sai appeared before my eyes in a flash. A thought bubbled up that Shirdi Sai Mantra form had taken a birth as Sri Rama Iyengar Swamigal. He used to address Seshan as Guruvayoorappan.

"Guruvayoorappa! My Blessings to both of you. Have you brought a devotee of 'Abirami' this time? He seems to be in an ecstatic state! Tell me, what happened?"

Seshan tried to explain the cause of my present state.

"After many years, through a book, he recognized his Guru. From that day on, he is neither eating properly nor able to do his regular work. His wife is very much worried about his condition. He is not showing interest in anything except chanting some Mantras. That is why, I brought him here. Please show him a way".

"Oh! That book which Paramahansa Yogananda wrote! I could see a Mahan sitting with half-closed eyes. What is his name?" Questioning me, He looked at my eyes piercingly. I was taken aback and uttered my Guru's name and asked him how he came to knew all of these. Seshan patted my thigh lightly and curtailed me not to ask such silly questions to a Great soul who knew things thread-bare. He then turned towards his Guru and asked for a remedy.

But, Swamigal said. "Why, Guruvayoorappa? Don't you know that many people wish to achieve such a higher state in their life-time? Because of his connection with his Guru in his previous lives, this fellow is bestowed with such a grace. He has done a lot of service to his Guru by fanning and massaging his feet in his previous janma.. He had requested for a higher achievement in Yoga-siddhi. Since his level of maturity and time was not ripe then, his Guru asked him to wait. Soon his LIFE-time was over in that past birth, but his Guru had not left him like that. To fulfill His promise, He had followed Vedham through his next birth to initiate him into the practice of Yoga."

Then, Swamigal asked me to tell the name of that particular type of Yogam.

"Kriya Yogam" I replied to his question. He then continued, "Mmm! Yes. The same one. Vedham is really blessed!"

Hearing this, Seshan said. "Swami! I knew it already. I casually looked at his horoscope in his house. He had the blessing to become a Poet and a Yogi. Just now, you have confirmed it!"

Swamigal interrupted Seshan's talk.

He turned towards me suddenly. “Dei! Did a Bharathiyaar book fall on your head at the age of twelve at your house? At that time, you were rummaging through the book shelf in your village-house. I am getting a vision of it.”

I was flabber-gasted. “Yes Swami! After my Thread ceremony, I had the habit of chanting slokams with my Grand-father Gargar. One day, he asked me to open the cup-board and take the book which I wanted. When I was scouring through them, the book by ‘Mahakavi Bharathi’ fell on my head. After that, I started reading and memorizing the songs with sincere effort in the mornings and evenings.”

“Yes, Swami! It is true! Sometimes Vedham sings those songs in an un-matching tune.” Seshan laughed at his own joke. Upasaka Swami also laughed. “There is nothing wrong in that! Mother Divine is very kind. She likes to hear his voice too. That is why he is blessed by Lord Murugan and Mother Abirami.”

As soon as I heard those kind words, tears started trickling down. “Is it true, Swami? Am I so gifted? I feel very thankful to you my , Swami!” I prostrated before him once again with a lot of happiness and faith. “Your words are giving me immense faith in Spirituality and in the practice of Yoga and Pranayama which I do daily.” I spoke with conviction.

“It is okay. Do not strain yourself too much. Once you start travelling inside from one chakra to another, you might face difficulties such as cold and bronchitis. But do not give up the practice. It will lead you to the right path of yoga.. Do not worry. You are going to meet Kanchi Mahaperiyava in the coming month. His grace will dissolve all your existing problems.”

Having said this, he blessed me by keeping his hands on my head. The heaviness in my head and the euphoria drowned instantly and I could feel my body becoming lighter like a Rose flower. After further discussions on spiritual matter that Swami and Seshan had, we bowed before him and took leave.

As soon as I came out, I thanked Seshan Sir for having brought me to meet such a Great Soul. The next day, I felt much better and left to my Office.

My wife was very happy after listening to my experiences. “Can you my dear,take us next week to meet that Upasakar Swami? I am very impressed and excited to meet him.” I replied with a ‘Yes’ and took my family on Sunday to meet that Saintand to receive his blessings.

He looked at my son Swaminathan. “Dei! You will come up well in your future. You will earn well in a new field of science and a team will work under you. Your elder sisters will get married in a good place and everyone will settle well. Do not worry about anything. Your father will buy a house nearby. Though there will be tough times initially, everything will fall in place over time. My Blessings for you all”. He bade good-bye to us.

Exactly on the fifteenth day, like the Swami said earlier, problems related to cold started. I had a very bad cough and the doctor felt that it was ‘Bronchitis’ and gave me medicines and an injection. I had to take some days off from my work again. It nearly took a week for me to get better.

Things started happening the way the Upasaka Swami said. A group of devotees from the Ratnagiriswarar temple at Besantnagar, decided to go on a journey to have a darshan of Sage Kanchi Maha-Periyava.

Kanchi Mahaperiyava was camping at Thenambakkam around that time. With Sri.Mukkoor Srinivasacharyar, a Upanyasagar, as the lead, three buses were arranged for accommodating all the people. I opted for a prime service for the group and boarded one of the buses, with my family on the allotted day. [This happened in September 1978].

After travelling for three and a half hours, the buses reached the destination. It was a temporary make-shift arrangement for the stay of the Revered Saint. There was a big hall fenced with bamboo sticks to prevent people from going too close to Mahaperiyava. Several volunteers were around taking care of the needs of the people.

In the centre, afar, Mahaperiyava was seated in a yogic posture. He looked like a meditating Lion. At that time, he had taken a silent vow as not to speak..[Kaashta Mounam]. His eyes shone like a sharp ray of sun reflecting on the people bowing before Him. His right palm was constantly

moving pouring out His Grace through-out.

Mukkoor Srinivasacharyar moved forward slowly making way for himself among the crowd, towards the Saint. He went near Him and prostrated. He crossed his hands on his chest,and held the tip of the cloth wound around his waist towards his mouth. He spoke a few words. Though the Saint's face didn't reveal any expressions, His eyes confirmed that He had absorbed the contents of what had been conveyed. As Sri Mukkoor instructed, I was standing behind the bamboo poles looking at the Great SAINT(Maha Periyavaa)

Now, Sree Mukkoor gave the white sheet of paper(in which I wrote my poem) to Him. The paper contained a few lines in a poetic form about the health issues I was facing for the past few days. I had also requested to 'guide me on whether to continue these yogic practices or not, to seek His Blessings and grace to overcome such difficulties in future. Without His help, my life will be futile.'- This was the gist of that poem.

The Saint read the lines slowly and conveyed something to Sri Mukkoor through hand gestures, who in turn asked me to stand straight in front of the Great Being. I obliged and Mahaperiyava instructed me by a signal to look at his eyes. That was the last thing I remembered. A huge dazzle of light emerged from his eyes which resembled those of a huge tiger. The radiance pierced my body and spread all over. Within two minutes, my body trembled and coiled like a snake and fell down. My consciousness went off from my brain.

My wife and others panicked. They lifted me by my hands and took me to the place where food and water was served. I was seated on a bench and cold water was splashed on my face. They gave me some food to eat. After around one hour, I regained my consciousness and we started on our journey back home. I was still in a semi-conscious state. The whole night passed with a slight fever and blabber through my half-asleep state. My head and eyes were burning. I was able to sleep better only in the early morning.

At 9'o clock in the morning , my wife woke me up. She fed me and took me to our family doctor, Mrs. Mangala. My wife tried to explain my

situation but I interrupted her.

'Doctor! I am unable to open my eyes fully and all I see is bright light everywhere which scares me. The electric wires appear as if they are on fire. Am I imagining things? What has happened to me, Doctor?" With intermittent cries, I tried to explain my condition.

My eldest daughter, Sudha said that Kanchiperiyava had mesmerized her father when my appa asked for His blessings only.

"No! No! You shouldn't talk like that, Sudha! Periyava's eyes are very powerful due to the 'Tapas' He had been doing for long years! Can anyone look straight into His eyes? They are like fire-balls. Your father is gifted to have Periyava's blessings. He will be alright very soon.

Four years before, my Uncle's son was blessed to get 'Nayana Deeksha' (initiation through eyes)from Mahaperiyava. So, I know what that it is. A little amount of agni [energy] from the tapas of Kanchiperiyava has entered your appa's body. This is due to his good karma. Anyhow, I will prescribe a medicine for his fever. Administer it for four days. Everything will be alright."

The doctor praised me, simultaneously giving faith and a little nudge to make me feel better. But, those four days were like living in a hell and difficult for myself as well as for those around me. My wife advised me to sit in Padmasana and start meditation so that I can forget my problems temporarily. Slowly, I started my practice and my body started coming back to normalcy. The glaring sensation along with the irritation in my eyes subsided slowly.

Mr.Ramaseshan came to see me one day and laughingly said. "See! Like Rama Iyengar Swami predicted, You received Blessings and Nayana Deeksha from Mahaperiyava. You are a very lucky fellow. Things will become better from now on."

My friend Jeyaradhan also visited me and appreciated me for my efforts and luck. As if like a cue, I took a yellow cloth and spread some

vermillion [Kum-kum] powder, chanted my Guru's name and gave it to him. I told him in a trance, that he will shine hence-forth in his literary field getting more accolades and recognition. I was very much in an ecstatic state at that time.

Somehow, my wife managed to frame a big sized Guru- 'Lahiri Mahasaya' picture and kept it in the prayer room. Jeyaradhan had bought a new copy of 'Autobiography of yogi' from one of his friends. He gave it to me and took his own. After long days of absence, I went back to my office. People who came to know about the turning point in my life wished me.

My close friend Vasudevan hugged me with tears flowing profusely. "See! You have received a great gift through Mahaperiyava. You should start practicing your Sadhana regularly. Then only, your chakras will be cleared one by one from your first Mooladhara Chakra and the energy will start flowing upward towards Agnja Chakra, which is in the centre of your eyebrows. ."

He also requested me not to disclose my secret divine experiences to anyone except him since they were not meant to be shared with everyone. 'Please keep all these events secretly inside your mind.'- He said. I took his words seriously believing to be the ones spoken by my Guru through him.

Then, I started practicing my Sadhana daily without any fear. After a month, I felt improvement in my whole self. I could feel the fragrant bloom of the chakras which resembled the Lotuses. New finer lights appeared along with the Divine beings. I could clearly see the Grace bestowed by the various Divine forms. Dwelling and diving deeper into those forms revealed Lord Murugan [Karthikeyan], Goddesses Saraswathi and Abirami often. The faith in Pranayama and 'Light Meditation' grew multifold within me. The continuous practice eventually led me to the Vision of my Guru Babaji.

" My Dear son, are you satisfied now? You have attained 'Deeksha'- from Mahaperiyava and My grace! Very soon, I will be taking you to Sri Mahavatar Babaji's cave." My Guru Sree Lahari Baba promised me.

Yes! The full moon day arrived and it was around twelve in the night. Two hours prior to this , my Guru made me sit in a Samadhi state in my prayer room. I became unaware of my body. I could see the light travelling from the lower to the higher chakras.

When it reached the Agjna chakra [centre of the Fore-head], two illuminous Elephants holding water pots in their trunks appeared on either sides. They poured the nectar [Amrutham] from the pots. I could feel the flow of the divine-nectar inside me. But, my Guru instructed me not to open my eyes.

He said that within a few minutes, we will be travelling to the Himalayan cave where His Guru, Sri Mahavatar Babaji does His Tapas. With the non-existence of Ego, Me, the so-called Vedham felt very happy. With tears flowing, unaware of my body consciousness, I felt myself floating in the sky in my Sukshma (Astral) body, with my Guru.

Finally, when I thought that ten minutes had passed, my Guru held my hands. He bowed and asked me to do the same. “You wished for a Darshan of our Great Guru Mahavatar Babaji in your previous birth. Look at Him now!”

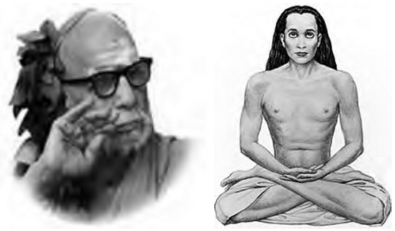
I couldn’t open my physical eyes and there was no permission to do so by my Guru. Also, it was possible to see both Great saints with our eyes closed. Looking through my inner vision, I embraced the situation where my two Great Gurus, surrounded by a soft powerful glow, were seated in Padmasana posture in that small snow-clad cave.

I sat before them in the same posture and stared at them with devotion. Mahavatar Babaji looked at me and raised His hands in a blessing form. He spoke.

“Vedham! You will be fine! Your Guru’s grace and my blessings will lead you to a further better path. You need not fear anymore. Sit for Kriya-Yoga practice every day like you did today. Your Guru will guide you thoroughly. With sincere practice, you will gradually rise to a higher level where you will attain a ‘pure body’ and eventually reach us. Whenever there

is utmost necessity, during the situations where you need me urgently, I will appear in your vision for a few seconds and clear your doubts. In those times, your body will quiver terribly and you will be in a drunken state, though for a short period of time. You need to take care of your body and nerves. Never keep them in a high energy state for too long. You can leave now. Teach this Kriya only to people who are true seekers. There should be no propaganda. Act normally. We will send people who are ready to learn this Yoga from you. You can guide them."

I didn't feel like asking anymore in that exalted state and just nodded my head. Then, I bowed down to touch the feet of the two 'Great Gurus'. Now, My Guru Lahari Babaji touched my body to lift me up. Within a minute, I was back home. With joyful tears trickling down profusely, I expressed my 'Pranams' in a bit louder voice in that otherwise silent night. I then realized that it was around 2 A.M. With blissful energy surrounding, I retired to sleep. A great line of peace went inner deep and deep in my subconscious mind.



(Saint Sri kanchi Mahaperiyavaa and Saint Mahavathar Babaji)-

CHAPTER-28

ADDENDUMS

With this chapter as the final one, I am ending the spiritual experiences bestowed upon me by my Guru Sri. Lahari Mahasaya. My kind Readers questioned me a lot about certain issues for the past 6 years on the aspect of pursuing this great Yogic path. I am humbly answering them as far as my knowledge goes!

1. What is the benefit you have derived through the practice of Kriya yoga?

2. Though you are on this path for long, aren't you suffering from Age-related health issues or are you untouched by them?

Answ- With increasing age, one tends to suffer from bodily issues. No doubt about this.This is purely related to our karma. The karma from our previous births and those wrong-doings done through our mind and body from the present birth determine the amount of suffering left. We need to endure the balance of karma, no matter who we are.

This Rule applies even to Bhagawan Sree. Ramana Maharishi, Paramahamsar and other Great souls. Any Practitioner of Kriya Yoga can stand beyond this mundane-consciousness of our 'Self'. He does not care about the pain inflicted in him because his brain, mind and tissues are floating in the God's pure Consciousness. Since a true Kriya Yogi is in unison ever with God, he ignores the pain and disability created by his physical body. Conversations with his own Guru become easier. He is always in a blissful state.

I will address myself as ‘He’ from now on, my dear Readers! I will highlight a few incidents shortly where his Guru showered His Blessings and guidance. This book will be incomplete if I failed to mention certain incidents or divine experiences which vedham’ enjoyed!

1. Two days after the blissful experience on the full moon night, his (Vedham’s)wife’s sister Gomathy and her husband Viswanathan came to visit him at his Besantnagar R.B.I Quarters home. They had heard about his health issues and so, wanted to see him. As soon as she entered the house, she casually touched her ear and panicked. She screamed! “My gold earring has fallen somewhere!” Both of them ran down and started searching in the sand pit and around the pathway they had been on a while before. The search was in vain. Meanwhile, Vedham, in an exalted state, called his wife and said, “Baba is asking them to search near D-block. The earring is shining in the sand. Convey this to your sister.”

My wife went down and conveyed the message. The earring glittered at the exact spot. Everyone was very happy to get guidance from the ‘Great Guru’.

2. After this incident, two years later, marriage was fixed for one of the sisters of Vedham. His father, Ramji wrote a letter from Veeravanallur(Tirunelveli Dist), “Babu! We have fixed an alliance for your sister. The marriage is in the month of January. The Groom is now working in Railways in North-India but his family is from Ayikudi. I don’t have any money. Arrange for the money by applying loan from your Office. Send Rs.15000 for the expenses.”

Ramji Gargar was known for his short-temper. Vedham did not have any choice. He had already withdrawn Rs.6000 from his Provident Fund in the previous year for some emergency. So, he knew the Office will not lend him anymore. He surrendered to his Guru Babaji. He couldn’t eat properly. He sat for six hours in Samadhi meditation for two days praying for some sort of help from the Divine. At last, by the end of the second day, his Guru appeared and spoke.

"Vedham! Do not worry! Guru Mahavatar Babaji and I had thought in many ways to help you. We have decided to give the money directly to your father. Write to him about this."-- Vedham wrote all in a card.But, his father couldn't understand and replied crossly.

"Dei! What do you think of yourself? Do you think you are a great yogi? You have written that Guru Babaji will hand over the money in person to me.. Who is that? Are you mad?"

Though Vedham felt very unhappy reading his father's letter filled with disbelief, deep inside, he knew that Babaji would help him somehow. His family also supported and enforced his thoughts by recalling the earring incident.

Finally, after twelve days, Vedham received a letter from his father. It was rather surprising to read. He had praised his son and added that he was very gifted to have Babaji as his Guru. Within three days after his letter had come, three merchants from Virudhunagar came to his father's house. They said that a Himalayan Saint came in one of the merchant's dream mentioning his(RAMJI"S)_ name and place. The Saint had asked him to buy the pillars and roof supports made with Burma teak wood in his Athazhanallur Village dilapilated house. Gargar immediately understood the situation and asked them to arrange for the extraction of wood from the old house at their own cost. He also bargained for Rs.20000. Finally, the amount was fixed for Rs.15000 for the sale of the valuable wood. Since the work was finished and the cash was delivered immediately, Gargar said that he was very happy. He also invited his son and his family to come to Veeravanallur a week before the marriage. Vedham and his family were very happy and prostrated before the picture of his Guru Babaji and praised his kindness. With Guru's Blessings, the marriage function was celebrated very well in Veeravanallur.

3. The third incident where Babaji's Blessings was bestowed on the family was when they shifted to Neelankarai, to their own house in 1989.. Vedham's son, Swaminathan wanted to study M.C.A through Correspondence course. There were periodical practical classes for which he needed a P.C(computer) to practice at his home. Swaminathan was quite adamant in getting one. Vedham enquired and estimated the cost to

be around Rs.30000 and wondered how he would be able to arrange for the money. Again, he turned to his Guru for help. With sincere practice of meditation for three days, Guru Babaji appeared finally.

He opined that.. ‘ the money will come through Office and there is no need to worry.’ Vedham couldn’t find any reason for it. But, a letter bearing a cheque for Rs.30000 arrived pushing everyone in the family to a surprise. The reason was- three months before, there was a strike by the Employees requesting for a salary hike. R.B.I and the Central Office had agreed to the demands and it all had happened a week ago. Since Vedham had taken sick leave, the cheque came directly to his house address. Swaminathan was very happy. They both went to Mylapore to purchase a new P.C and a desk for it. So, Swaminathan , his son, excelled in his final exams and got a placement in T.V.S. company.

Many incidents had happened in the life of Sri. Vedham where he had been guided by his Guru Lahari Babaji. He had helped many of his yoga disciples by seeking divine guidance from the Guru Mahan. Due to the limitation of pages in this book, we are concluding with this chapter. Many such events had been described in another book called “Yogamum Bogamum’ by the Author.

Yes! Surely everything in his life was indeed the Blessing he received from Guru Babaji.

CHAPTER-29

THE FRUITFUL VISIT TO THE MAHAVATAR BABAJI’S CAVE

As a Practitioner of ‘Kriya Yoga’, I always had the desire to visit Sri Guru Mahavatar Babaji’s cave. It is situated in ‘Kukuchina’ or ‘Dhunagiri’ mountain. But, due to old age and its endless gift of pain, I was unable to make a trip in this physical body. Indeed, Babaji has to give permission for anyone to visit His ‘Holy Cave’. Many of my friends had shared with me that the visit to the cave requires austerity along with the control of mind, senses and food intake. Of course, total surrender with immense love and faith is required too. Only people with such qualities can successfully complete this journey as there will be a lot of difficulties to overcome on the way as they move forward towards the destination of entering the ‘Holy Cave’.

It was indeed a surprise. Though I did not get an opportunity, I was gifted to hear from one of the devotees of Sri Babaji. I can confirm that it was only due to His blessings that I could hear about the experiences of his visit.

Yes! In the month of July 2016, on a Monday morning, I started chanting Gayathri Mantra with deep concentration. I chose to chant the mantra 1008 times. The crisp morning air was laced with the fragrance of lit agarbathis. The occasional callings of the Cuckoos mixed with the

otherwise still and silent air added cool, conduciveness to my practice.

With the initial invocation of Babaji with love, the chanting reached five hundred rounds. Suddenly, a cool invigorating feeling started in my neck and slowly travelled upwards towards the Sahasrara chakra and spread evenly. It was so relaxing and comforting that I forgot my counts of japam. My body became stiff like a log. I could feel Babaji's pure light peeping slightly from above into me. It was a really unique experience.

Due to my physical restrictions, I always felt bad that I never got an opportunity to visit Babaji's Cave. To overcome my yearning, I think He had given me such a divine experience of appearing as a bright glow above my head. The thought of such motherly affection poured on me by the Divine Guru instigated a flow of happy tears with all my heart. A Great Tamilian Saint 'Manickavasagar' stated in one of his songs- 'Tears have the power to attract the God to you'. I temporarily forgot my existence in the divine smile of my Guru which poured out love and affection. I prostrated before Him and praised His Holy Name several times.

After twenty minutes, He brought me back to the material consciousness of this world. When I came out of my prayer room, I had an inner instinct that something is going to happen that day and that I would feel lucky to witness. Yes! After half an hour, my telephone rang.

The call was from 'Sri Babaji Aanmeegam' Publisher.

"Sir! I want an article on the trip to Babaji's cave. This is for the Diwali special issue. I need it in a week's time." It didn't sound like a request but a sort of kind order. I was filled with cool happy shivers. Oh! Now I understood why my Guru gave me such a wonderful experience a few minutes before.

Immediately, I agreed upon his request but a faint fear rose within me as to how and where I was going to collect the information from. But, my confused mind wasn't aware that our kind Babaji would have planned for the execution of this 'Himalayan' task.

The following day, at around ten in the morning, I came out of my room after meditation. The doorbell rang. It was 'Kriyaban' Mani, who had learnt yoga and meditation from me six years ago. He must be forty by now. He had come from Maraimalai nagar. I greeted him inside with a smile,and asked him to sit and make himself comfortable.

After the usual enquiries, I asked him the reason of his visit. He spoke with enthusiasm in his voice. "Guruji Sir! Last month, I had an opportunity to visit Babaji's cave with one of my friends who is also a 'Kriyaban' practitioner. I wanted to share my divine experiences with you. It was a soul-warming experience."

This information startled me. Oh! Our Guru Babaji's ways of Blessings are truly unique. He never lets his disciples and worshippers down. I explained to him, the experience I had a day before.

I am now going to share the details of Kriyaban Mani's trip with you all. I took out my writing pad. You can also note it down if you wish to. Mani outlined a short description of the route he travelled to reach the Holy Cave. He had also visited the important places and shrines en-route. He took a holy dip in the rivers on the way. A friend who accompanied him was his 'Tour-guide'. Apparently, whenever his friend decides to go on a trip to Babaji's Cave, he tries to take people along with him who wish to visit the holy place.

"Also, if only we take the Blessings of all Deities on the way, Babaji will allow us to visit Him. Right!" He said, in between laughs. "Since I got a good guide, I took the trip."

"Mani! The trip would have cost you around 30000 rupees. Is it not?" I questioned him. "Yes Guruji! If you carry an ATM card along with some money, you can manage even if you run out of cash." Speaking, he drew a line on the piece of paper.

Chennai---Delhi---Haridwar---Rishikesh---Rudraprayag---Dunagiri [or] Dhronagiri Mountain---Here, in 'Kukuchina', 'Babaji's Cave'--- Back to Delhi.

He drafted the shortest trip sketch possible and explained the whole journey like a story, in a beautiful manner.

" Guruji,We started our trip in summer. We took a flight from Chennai to Delhi. [If possible, it is always better to fore-go the train journey to avoid physical strain and tiredness]. Once we landed, we went to a hotel, had food and took some rest. Though the Capital of India was ruled by several Mughal rulers, it was always connected to Ramayana and Mahabharatha. It is a 'Punyabhoomi'. Since we as tourists acknowledged and understood the connection of the place with Spirituality, we visited a small temple and prayed Babaji to help us finish our 'Yatra' in a good manner.

Delhi was once called 'Indraprastham'. But, the name changed somehow. This was new information for us. Then, as per our plans, a comfortable big car with AC arrived. "Now, we will be travelling to Haridwar via the National Highway [NH] for 205 kms." Our guide said.

The car reached Haridwar exactly after three hours and twenty minutes. The guide also told us that the name meant 'Passage to meet Vishnu'. A huge statue of Lord Shiva was standing at the entrance. It was built by a South-Indian Sthapathi [Sculptor]. We bowed before the huge Shiva. Haridwar is one among the few places where Kumbha-Mela happens. We walked around to find many sadhus waving at us with 'Hara Om Nama Shivaya' on their lips and blessing us. It was a thrilling experience which gave me the feeling that Babaji was blessing us through them.

At 'Brahmakund', which is a Ghat or a bathing place in Ganges, we witnessed the 'Ganga Aarthi' performed for Mother Ganga by several women and Sadhus. The time of our visit was apt. We thoroughly enjoyed the eye-capturing experience. The light from the evening sun flickered like golden rays, touching and scattering the light from the lamps all around.

We then proceeded towards the Chandi Devi temple. Chandi is a huge form of Mahakali. Her Blessings are needed for a smooth trip ahead. The next day, we set out to Rishikesh early in the morning. We reached our destination in thirty minutes after travelling in NH road for 16.2 kms.

(Rishikesh can also be reached by bus.)

Rishikesh is a place filled with Saints and Sadhus. As far as our eyes could reach, we could see them. It felt as if we had entered an ancient city. Our Guide said that Rishikesh was the world's capital city for Yoga. "Since we have already travelled this far, it is advisable to visit Sage Vasishta's cave though the path is very difficult to travel." After an hour's journey, we reached the cave. The way to the cave had many picturesque scenes strewn around the path of the River Ganges. The Great Sage had done a long Penance here and the silent atmosphere was suitable for Meditation. We all sat for a while trying to focus our attention.

From there, we travelled along the river path to reach 'Devaprayag'. Here, the rivers Alaknanda and Bhagirathi join together in a divine communion with the Mother Ganges making her more pure. We visited an old Lord Rama temple there. With pious thoughts sprouting in our minds, we had a good darshan of the Lord and had our food.

Within a few minutes, one of our friends complained of severe stomach ache. The guide asked him to calm down by telling him that he was an Ayurvedic healer too. He took out some herbal medicine and chanted 'Om Kriya Babaji Namaha' and put it in his mouth. What a surprise! The person who complained of pain relaxed for a while by leaning on a wall. Within twenty minutes, he felt normal and praised the guide for his effective medicine.

After a few minutes of relaxation, we resumed our travel towards 'Rudraprayag' which was 143 kms away. It took us three hours to reach there. This was the place where the Pandavas invoked 'Rudra' [A fierce-form of Shiva] for atoning the sins committed by them. Though initially, Rudra was angry with them, the intense devotion of the Pandavas pleased him and he bestowed his blessings and declared that the place would henceforth be called as 'Rudraprayag'.

Mother Ganges flows very ferociously here. We enjoyed the beauty of the irate river at a distance.

The guide ushered us to our vehicle so that we could start our journey towards ‘Karnaprayag’. It took us 45 minutes to cover 32 kms to reach there.

The history says that Karna (of Mahabharath) performed penance towards his father Lord Surya [The Sun God] at this place and was bestowed with blessings and powerful weapons. We went around a few places here and started our journey towards ‘Dhunagiri’ mountain. It took nearly one and a half hours [around 76 kms] on the National Highway.

The Sanjeevani Mountain depicted in the Puranas is none other than this sacred mountain. Yes! The atmosphere was loaded with the fragrance of special herbs which hit our noses. When Lakshmana brother of Lord Rama during the war with Demon Ravana,was attacked by a powerful weapon of Indrajit, he fell down unconscious. Lord Hanuman brought this mountain to save him.

I put forward a question to the guide about the name of this mountain. “Did Maharishi Dronacharya perform a penance here?” Our guide replied with a smile, “Maybe!” Then he said that the life expectancy of the people living in Dhunagiri Mountain and those doing Tapas is usually high. He said that the information was authentic. He had asked many Sanyasis about this.

One of our friends Mr. Ram said, “Then, if it is so, please leave me here! With the recurring ailments and repeated nagging of my wife, is it not better to be here?” Everyone broke into laughter hearing this but our guide took it very seriously. “Oh! No! I have promised myself in Babaji’s Name that I will get you all back home safely. What will I tell your angry wife?” . Then Ram became calm.

The guide spoke further, “This is the place where Babaji’s Cave is situated. Mahavatar Babaji is like the root of the Divine practice of Kriya Yoga which lengthens our life expectancy and protects us. From now on, each one of you should be careful while climbing the mountain. Look around you while climbing as the path is treacherous.”

We agreed to follow his words and started chanting Babaji's Name with faith and devotion. On the way, we reached a temple. It had many paintings on the walls which displayed many scenes and stories from various Hindu literature and Epics. Our guide gave us a short historical tour of the temple looking at the paintings.

"Karna would have come here with a broken heart. Maybe Draupadi visited this temple to forget her worries. Arjuna would have come here to celebrate his victory. Many Sages had highlighted about this temple which has hidden stories on our Hindu Scriptures."

After covering a particular distance, many of us felt uneasy and experienced shortness of breath. Again our guide came to our rescue. He put his hand into his sling bag and took out some herbal potions. He gave each one of us a small portion of the medicine and asked us to chew it slowly with saliva. After ten minutes, we all felt better. Our leg pain also vanished. Teasingly, one of our fellow travellers said that the guide will henceforth be called as 'Herbal Guide'. We all laughed.

Our guide laughed at his wits but started wondering about the whereabouts of the driver Guna Singh whom he had booked earlier through a phone call. Just then, a Jeep came into our vision at a distance. "Aha! Babaji is guiding us at the right time. My friends! Don't be careless and casual that we are going in a Jeep. The road ahead is very narrow. The path is strewn with rocks and stones. A small mistake will lead us to a fatal fall."

The warning from him made us shiver. Together, we started invoking Babaji to help us reach safely. After half an hour of rickety ride, the Jeep came to a halt. The driver announced that he couldn't take us further and that we had to walk to reach the destination. Then, he gave each one of us a stick for support and took the money from the guide.

With the help of the stick-support, we started walking for a distance of two kms chanting Babaji's Name, a bit aloud. There were sign boards throughout the path to guide us. Quite unexpectedly, towards our right, a beautiful Water-Falls came into view carrying the scent of herbs in the air. The cool drops of water splashed on our face and body invigorating

our senses. We took a bath to get rid of the tiredness of the long journey. The smell of the herbs wafted from our bodies and our mind was fully occupied with the thoughts of our Guruji Babaji.

Then, suddenly, the guide pointed towards a place which looked pale. He said that the place was the spot where Mahavatar Babaji gave his Darshan to his prime disciple Sri Lahari Mahasaya. Yes! That was the indication that we had reached Babaji's cave. When we looked intently, we saw two caves. One was small and the other one was comparatively bigger. Babaji always preferred to stay in the smaller cave with his two prime disciples. The other cave hosted the other disciples.

"Let us first visit the small cave. We have to come back before 8 p.m. After that, leopards start roaming around this place." The guide instructed us. A feeling of fear ran down our nerves!

"Mahavatar Babaji would come to the bigger cave to instruct his disciples. But for us, it would take atleast two hours by walk to reach there. So, right now, let us enter the small cave one by one."

The steps were slippery. So we had to look around carefully for the sharp rocks which jutted out by feeling the walls with our hands and crawling slowly. We tried to squeeze ourselves into the cave. We heard a voice calling out "Patience! Patience!" from behind us.

Finally, we reached the inside of the cave. Our chattering minds calmed down instantaneously. An inexpressible joy surrounded us. We could feel the spiritual vibrations coursing through our veins. Yes! Babaji was still alive and the power of His Tapas had spread all over the cave in such a tremendous amount that we could feel it. The path of the cave went deep into the place where Babaji is still alive in His spiritual body. We forgot ourselves for a while bringing His image into focus- Babaji in Padmasana with his eyes focusing on the tip of his nose. Such a vision appeared and in a minute vanished!

Yes! Without His permission, nobody can enter this place. True devotion, undaunted faith and compassion towards all beings are the qualities

required to fulfill the criteria. True surrender is absolutely necessary for a Kriya Yogi.

The famous actor Rajinikanth once said, “Whenever I visit the cave of Babaji, I feel like as if I am inside the womb of my mother.”

The Guide asked us to pray deeply for what we wanted. Our friend Ram asked, a bit louder, for the admission of his son in a reputed college. Instantly, a fellow traveller replied that he will get it done as he was one of the Committee Members in that college. Another friend asked for a good marriage proposal for his daughter as he was searching for one for the last three years. Listening to the prayers,one, Mr. Mukundhan replied that he too was searching for a match for his 32-year old son. They happily promised each other to fix the alliance once they reached their homes. Tell me. Is there a better Astrologic Centre to fix a marriage other than our Babaji’s Sanctum Sanctorium?

The trip to the Divine cave thus became one of the most revered journeys for all of us. Kriyaban Mani thus concluded narrating the experiences of his spiritual journey of his life-time in a very exciting and thankful way.

(The Secret wonderful cave of Sree Mahavathar Babaji)

(Babu,-theauthor-alias..kaviyogi.vedham)

(My Daughter in law **Mrs. Prabha Swami with her son (child) Maharshay**

his wife Poet Sudha and sonChi. Sudharsan

(My son in law Mr. Rajan with

Sudha's cousin Iswarya with her hubby)

ssAnd also

(Kaviyogi's second daughter Raji with her husband Bala)

(ka

(Kaviyogi Vedham and his wife Kamakshi)--Sitting- his son Swami, in lap-Maharshay and first son Rohith- All photos taken when they were in CANADA)

(SUBHAM)

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